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The
COUNTY PENNANT

Books By William Heyliger

The County Pennant

Captain Fair-and-Square

Don Strong of the Wolf Patrol

Off Side

Against Odds

Strike Three!

Bartley, Freshman Pitcher

Bucking the Line

The Captain of the Nine

D. APPLETON & COMPANY

Publishers

New York



"We're tied with Irontown again. O, you Schuyler boy!"
[PAGE 268]

The COUNTY PENNANT

BY

WILLIAM HEYLIGER

AUTHOR OF "CAPTAIN FAIR-AND-SQUARE," "DON STRONG OF THE WOLF PATROL,"
"AGAINST ODDS," ETC.



ILLUSTRATED BY
W. W. CLARKE

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TO
FRANKLIN K. MATHIEWS

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CHAPTER I

THE BOY FROM IRONTOWN

IT was early March and snow covered the ground. Yet, in the newspaper that lay open on the bed in Buddy Jones's room, there was baseball news from the southern training camps and pictures of big league players in action.

Three boys leaned over the paper. They were Buddy, captain of the Fairview High School nine; Poole, president of the Athletic Association; and Wally Hamilton, newly appointed official scorer of the team.

Poole straightened his back and danced across the room. "About three more weeks and we'll be at it," he chuckled.

"Chowder!" cried Wally, "and won't we make some of those other teams sick!"

"Grover Cleveland Alexander," Buddy read aloud. "I bet he can pitch some."

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Poole and Wally looked at each other and groaned.

"Poor youth," said Wally.

"He has pitchers on the brain," said Poole.

"I bet he talks about pitchers in his sleep," Wally added.

Buddy turned away from the bed. "I know," he grinned. "I guess I'm a pest. But where am I going to get a pitcher to help Arthur Stone? Where's that schedule?"

Wally found it under the newspaper.

"Eighteen games," said Buddy. "Ten teams. And a pennant for the school that comes out on top. Think of that!"

"What else have we been thinking of?" Wally asked indignantly.

"A real league," Buddy went on. "Everything just the way they have it in a real league, too—umpires with authority to forfeit games and expel players, official scorers, official averages issued by league headquarters. Good night, isn't it great?"

Poole and Wally had caught his enthusiasm.

"No more unimportant games," said the president of the A. A. "Every game counts because every team in the league is our rival."

"No more looking upon Irontown as the big thing," said Wally. "A win from Irontown doesn't get us any more than a win from Hasbrouck."

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"And if little Fairview can walk away with that pennant——" Poole began.

"Wake up!" said Buddy. "Little Fairview has one pitcher."

Poole sighed and walked to the window. But Wally's enthusiasm was in too healthy a condition to be choked.

"You can't always tell about pitching," he said. "For four years McGraw kept Schupp of the Giants wearing the paint off the bench. Then look what happened last year. Look what Schupp did."

Poole turned from the window. "What's the matter?" he asked. "Is Schupp's brother coming to Fairview?"

Wally gave a snort of disgust. "You're funny, aren't you? No, Schupp's brother isn't coming to Fairview. I don't know if he has a brother. I mean that you can't always tell about pitchers. Maybe if we gave Ahrens a chance——"

"He's off again," said Poole.

"Am I?" Wally demanded. "How about it, Buddy?"

The captain shook his head. "Last year," he said patiently, "Ahrens had about two cents' worth of control. This year he'll have less."

Wally bristled. "Why?"

"Remember that crack on the wrist he got last month playing hockey?"

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"Oh!" Wally's shoulders drooped. "I forgot about that."

"You wouldn't if you were captain," said Buddy, and Poole nodded his head.

Wally sat on the bed and stared at the newspaper. Presently he said without looking up from the page:

"Carrots O'Toole will coach us, won't he?"

"Yes."

"Well, he's a pitcher. If he took Ahrens——"

Buddy and Poole sprang toward the bed. Wally found himself tumbled on his back and pounded with pillows until he begged for mercy and promised to be good. Then Buddy and Poole drew back, and Wally emerged from the wreck and pulled himself together. There was a button gone from Buddy's coat and Poole's tie was around under his ear. The scorer grinned.

"Gave you a battle, didn't I?"

They acknowledged that he had.

"And the odds were two to one against me. Well, that's how Fairview will fight when she goes after the pennant."

He walked to the window. Presently Buddy was on one side of him and Poole was on the other, and the captain's hand rested on his shoulder. They understood each other, these three.

In the distance, through the bare trees, they saw the top of the high school flagstaff.

THE BOY FROM IRONTOWN

"The smallest school in the league," Wally said. "If we could win that pennant——"

"Find me another pitcher," said Buddy, "and the smallest school will make them all sit up."

A few minutes later his friends departed, and Buddy started work upon his afternoon chores. While he sifted ashes in back of the grape arbor his thoughts were all of baseball. Suddenly he stopped and a far-away look came into his eyes.

"County champions!" he said. Then he laughed, and shook his head, and went on with his work. But the picture he had created would not down.

At 7 o'clock Bob Jones came home from the Fairview Iron Works. He was assistant foreman now. He had begun to climb the ladder of success. But to Buddy he was the same big brother he had always been.

During supper Bob told of that day's doings at the works. Mr. Arch, the new superintendent, had at last come over from Irontown to take charge. He was boarding at the Fairview Hotel.

That wild picture of county champions was still in Buddy's mind. He paid very little attention to what Bob said. But all at once he became aware that Bob was saying something about a boy. Buddy picked up his ears.

"What boy was that, Bob?"

"Mr. Arch's son. He was at the works with him today."

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Buddy sat up straight. "A big fellow, Bob?"

"Well, about seventeen."

"Does he work? Does he go to school? Did he say anything about school?"

"A little," Bob said dryly. "Mr. Arch said he was going to enter our high school and Schuyler said—well, a little."

Buddy did not notice the pause before those last words. "Schuyler," he said. "Is that his name, Bob? Schuyler Arch?"

"Yes. What are you so anxious about?"

"We need a pitcher," Buddy answered. "We have only Arthur Stone. Does this fellow look—— You know, does he look like a soft Molly?"

"He does not," said Bob. "He looks trim and hard." The man's face became thoughtful. "So you hope he may be able to pitch ball for Fairview. Is that it?"

Buddy nodded and looked hopefully at his brother.

"Well——" Bob looked down at his coffee cup. "Good luck, kid," he said.

Buddy was too excited to see any significance in what his brother had said. A new boy was coming to Fairview, a fellow who was trim and hard, a fellow who might be a pitcher. Mackerel, wouldn't it be great if he was?

Next morning, when Buddy came to school, he was handed a letter that had come addressed to the



"County champions!" he said.

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A. A. The communication was from Drake, captain of the Irontown nine, and called attention to the fact that Fairview had not yet named the umpire who would judge balls and strikes when she played at home and who would make base decisions when she traveled.

"What's his hurry?" Buddy demanded. "There's lots of time."

"Read the next page," said Poole.

Buddy turned to the next page, saw a name, and almost jumped. He read rapidly:

"By the way, one of our freshmen, a fellow named Schuyler Arch, is leaving here because his father's business has been shifted to Fairview. He's going to enter your school. We had him figured as a pretty good pitcher and hoped he'd win a lot of games; but now, of course, we hope he gets the tar licked out of him."

Drake's little touch of humor was lost on Buddy. He started to read the letter a second time. Then a hand reached over his shoulder and clutched it.

"A pitcher," Wally yelled. "How about that pennant now?"

"Drake says he's only a kid pitcher," Poole warned.

"Drake! Huh!" Wally turned up his nose. "Drake's sore because Irontown's losing him. Anyway, when we need a pitcher so badly and a pitcher comes, that means something, doesn't it?"

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"Let's wait until we look him over," said Poole.

But Wally's bubbling optimism could not be killed with mere words. He refused to let anyone pull a gray cloud over his patch of blue sky. All Fairview needed was a pitcher. Now she had him. Wasn't that enough for anybody but an old sour belly?

Poole grinned. "Meaning me?"

"Sure," said Wally; "who else? I wonder if we could get through the season without losing a game."

Buddy went in to classes thrilling to Wally's buoyancy. True, Poole was probably right—it might be well to wait and see. If anybody asked him about the new boy he would take Poole's course—wait and see. But down in his own heart his hopes ran almost as high as Wally's. He built his castles in the air and dreamed his golden dreams. County champions!

At noon he found the students awaiting him outside the school. Wally had blithely spread the information that a second Christy Mathewson was coming to Fairview. The students were clamorous for news. Had this fellow Arch been a sensation at Irontown? Was Irontown down in the dumps because he had left?

Reckless confidence of this kind was bad, and Buddy knew it. It was all right for him to dream. In fact, he rather liked to paint the might be. But

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to have the school chasing a will-o'-the-wisp was another matter. Where the school was concerned Poole's idea was right—wait and see.

Buddy tried to stop the clamor. He said that Schuyler Arch was coming to Fairview and that he was a pitcher, and that that was as much as anybody knew.

"You're stringing us," a voice said accusingly.

"I'm not," Buddy answered.

A moment of silence.

"Wasn't he a sensation at Irontown?" another voice demanded.

"Isn't Irontown all broken up because he came here?"

Buddy shook his head. "We don't know anything about him, fellows. That's flat."

"How about Wally saying he's a wonder?"

Buddy tried to laugh it off. He said that everybody knew that Wally said more than his prayers. But for all that the boys cried, "All right, Buddy," and winked at each other as they broke up.

Buddy knew that the damage had been done. He could almost hear the students telling each other that Wally was the captain's friend and that Wally ought to know something.

"Oh!" he groaned under his breath. "Just for about five minutes with that big-mouth."

He did not see Wally until it was time to go back to school. The score-keeper, swinging his arms

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recklessly, was striding along as though he owned the road. Buddy hurried and overtook him.

"What have you been telling the fellows?" he demanded.

Wally grinned. "Hello, Bud! I guess I made a good job of it. Stirred them up some, didn't I?"

"You surely did," Buddy agreed. "They think he's a world-beater, and if he can't pitch knuckle balls and up-shoots they'll think he's a lemon."

The grin faded from Wally's face.

"And then," said Buddy, "when he finds we think he's great, he'll worry himself sick trying to be great, and he won't be able to pitch a lick."

Wally's face lengthened.

"Isn't there any other stirring news you could have given them?" Buddy asked sarcastically.

"Gee!" Wally sighed. "And I thought I was doing something great."

His round, fat face was so completely woe-be-gone that presently Buddy's anger began to slip. All at once the captain laughed. At that Wally's spirits picked up wonderfully. He promised he'd go around and tell the fellows that he had discovered that the new pitcher had a weak arm, and was subject to headaches, and had a lame back.

Buddy clutched his arm. "You'll tell them *what?*"

"I—I guess I'll tell them nothing," said Wally, and grinned feebly.

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The students amused themselves before the bell rang by marching back and forth across the school lawn. Some genius had dashed off what he was pleased to call a song, and now the students chanted it as they marched:

We'll get the county pennant and we'll get it good and tight,
We'll get it without sweating, it won't even be a fight,
Irontown may win it—oh, yes, she may—she might,
If we all get the pip.

At any other time the spirit and dash of the students would have set Buddy's heart to beating faster. Now, however, he felt no thrill. The fight for the county pennant was not a matter of hurrah and hurray. It was a campaign that stretched through nine long weeks. It was something to be planned, and re-planned, and planned again. It called for calmness, and caution, and courage. And here was the school throwing up its hat and going off on a jamboree of folly.

If Schuyler Arch had come to school and had shown rare form, Buddy would have expected an outburst of confidence. But not a Fairview boy had ever seen Schuyler. Not a Fairview boy knew what he could do. And yet the school had made up its mind that his coming meant glory. It wasn't counting chickens before they were hatched; it was counting chickens before they even had the eggs from which they were to be hatched.

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"Pleasant little picture," said Poole's voice.

Buddy nodded soberly, but did not look around.

"As a starter of things," Poole went on, "Wally is some little starter."

This time Buddy did not even bother to nod. "He thought he was doing a wonderful thing," he said.

"That's like Wally," said Poole.

For a few minutes they continued to watch.

"Some of the ball players are in it," said Poole. "They ought to have more sense."

Buddy thought so too. If the nine got cocky and bumptious, he was in for it sure. He turned away and walked toward the school entrance. Poole fell into step with him.

"If this is going on when Arch arrives," said the president of the A. A., "you'll have your hands full—particularly if he's a chap who likes himself."

Buddy stopped short. "You mean he'll get chesty?"

Poole nodded.

"Maybe he won't come for a week or more," Buddy said hopefully.

But that night, at the supper table, he learned that he could expect Schuyler any day. Bob said that Mr. Arch had leased the old Henderson house on Orchard road.

"When are they going to move in?" Buddy asked.

"Tomorrow." Bob looked at him a moment.

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"Still thinking of this fellow as a pitcher, Buddy?"

"He can pitch," said the boy. "We had a letter from Irontown."

"And you're figuring on him now more than ever?"

"N—no," said Buddy. He thought of that day's demonstration in front of the school. "That is," he added, "not as much as I was. I'll wait and see how things go."

Bob's lips twitched. "Wise boy," he said.

This time Buddy had caught a vague something in Bob's voice. What did his brother mean—or did he mean anything?

Next day the school was still stewing. When classes were dismissed for the day Buddy trudged off to Orchard road. A moving van stood in front of the Henderson house. The captain turned away and walked home thoughtfully. What would the morrow bring?

He was up early next morning. Long before his usual time he left the house. But instead of going directly to school, he went around to where Poole lived. He whistled outside the house until the president of the A. A. opened the front door.

"Hello!" said Poole. "Aren't you early this morning? What's up?"

"I think Schuyler will be at school today," Buddy said.

Poole called to wait until he got his hat and coat.

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A few minutes later he came out with his books under his arm. They started for school. Buddy told about the moving van.

"If he could have waited a few days——" Poole began. "Oh, well," he broke off suddenly, "there's no use in worrying. He may not come today."

But when they came in front of the school, a strange boy was pacing back and forth. Early as it was, some of the students had already appeared. They were grouped on the school steps and were talking excitedly. The new boy paid no attention to them, but walked back and forth as though annoyed.

"Something," said Poole, "seems to be on his mind."

Buddy's eyes took in every line of the stranger. Here was the boy on whom so much depended! The captain noted with approval his slim, straight body and the wide sweep of his shoulders. Shoulders like that seemed made just to put speed into a baseball.

"Going to speak to him?" Poole asked.

Buddy nodded and strode forward. "I imagine," he said, "that you are Schuyler Arch."

The other boy's eyes brightened. "Yes; that's my name."

"Mine is Jones." Buddy held out his hand. "I'm captain of the nine. Let me make you welcome to Fairview."

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Schuyler shook hands. The sudden brightness that had come to his eyes at mention of his name disappeared. His grip was rather limp.

Buddy called Poole and introduced him. Then the curious students crowded forward to see the boy who was to help Fairview win a pennant. Buddy introduced them one by one. Somehow, Schuyler's voice seemed flat and dead as he responded to the greetings.

"Suppose I take you around and show you the place," Buddy proposed.

"There isn't much to see, is there?" Schuyler asked.

"Well, we can look at what there is," Buddy smiled. He did not notice Poole's frown.

He led the way into the school and through the classrooms. Presently they came outdoors again.

"Is that all?" Schuyler asked curiously.

Buddy nodded. "That's all."

"Where's your gym?"

"We have none."

A shadow crossed Schuyler's face.

"We have a pretty good type of school spirit," said Poole.

"Have you?" said Schuyler, and lifted his eyes.

Buddy led the way across the lawn out as far as the road. By this time the students had begun to grow excited. Buddy hoped that Schuyler would

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not notice the high tension. He talked rapidly, trying hard to hold the new boy's attention.

But Schuyler paid little heed. He stared for a full minute at the weather-beaten, two-storied high school building.

"You're coming out for the nine, aren't you?" Buddy asked.

"I suppose so." Schuyler was still staring at the building.

Buddy had a sudden feeling that something was wrong. He glanced at Poole. Then he heard Schuyler's voice.

"My eye," said Schuyler, "but this is one cheap little school, isn't it?"

CHAPTER II

SCHUYLER IS JOLTED

HAD a bomb been exploded out there on the school grounds, Buddy could not have been more surprised. He swung around and looked at Schuyler as though refusing to believe his ears. But the expression on Schuyler's face left little room for doubt. Schuyler's face was a flat picture of disgust.

"I wouldn't say it was a cheap school," Poole said quietly. "It is small."

"Small?" Schuyler laughed. "Why, you could put this in one corner of Irontown and not know it was there."

"Irontown." Poole wrinkled his forehead. "Oh, yes; that's a school a few miles from here."

Schuyler glared. Just then the school bell rang. Schuyler said stiffly that he had a letter for Dr. Minor, the principal, and stalked toward the entrance.

"I wonder," Poole mused aloud, "if he will tell the fellows what he told us."

Buddy did not reply. What was the use? What could he say?

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He never knew what happened in assembly that morning. His brain was in a whirl. Slowly, as his amazement passed, one thing became clear. Despite the way he had ridiculed the hair-brained cocksureness of the school, he, too, had counted heavily on Schuyler's coming. He knew it now because of the sharp disappointment that stabbed, and stabbed, and stabbed.

Not that he had made up his mind that Schuyler was a false alarm. Oh, no; nothing like that. He had been too powerfully impressed by those shoulders. But he did not see how a boy could pitch good ball for a school he did not like.

Assembly was dismissed. Out in the corridors, as the students hurried to classrooms, Buddy could hear some of them singing softly:

We'll get the county pennant and we'll get it good and tight,
We'll get it without sweating, it won't even be a fight——

"Wait!" said Buddy to himself. "Wait until Schuyler begins to talk."

He kept his mind on his lessons that morning—as much as he could, anyway. But slowly a mixture of resentment and anger was beginning to run through his blood. What right had any boy to come to Fairview and mock it? If he didn't like the school, why didn't he stay away? Who did he think he was, anyway?

SCHUYLER IS JOLTED

There was a time, Buddy knew, when any Tom, Dick or Harry could have turned up his nose. There was a time when Fairview's tarnished name had been a by-word among the other schools. But all that was past. The Fairview of today was as clean as any school in the county.

Fairview had struggled free of its past only after a fight. Buddy knew about that fight because he had led it. Aided by Poole he had warred on ringers, and ringers had been driven out. Underhand methods had given place to clean play. The first school song had been written. School spirit had come.

It had not been easy to arouse the students. There had been days when it looked as though fair play and clean sport were doomed. But Buddy had stuck grimly to his guns. In the stress and storm of the battle a passionate love for Fairview had been born in his heart. And now, when the fight was over, when honor had come, to have a stranger stroll in and sneer—— Buddy's clenched hand struck the top of his desk.

"Jones!" the teacher said sharply.

Buddy flushed and bent low over his algebra.

Around the room boys grinned and winked at each other. They were quite sure what that blow meant. Buddy had been picturing one of Schuyler's fast balls smacking into his mitt.

At noon, when classes were dismissed, Buddy

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waited for Poole; and while he waited, Schuyler came out of the building.

"Hello!" the new boy said carelessly.

"Hello!" said Buddy.

Schuyler buttoned his overcoat. "Not many students here," he observed.

"Not many."

"That's the worst of these small schools," Schuyler said with a superior air. "You're the captain; you know how it is. Shy on students, shy on athletes, shy on everything. If you need a third-baseman you have to manufacture one out of an outfielder. If you need a catcher—— Who is the catcher here?"

"I am," said Buddy.

Schuyler's cheeks went red. Soon he strolled away. As he turned up the road he whistled shrilly, and the tune that he whistled was "Men of Iron," the Irontown school song.

A moment later Poole came out. The president of the A. A. knew that whistled air. He looked at Buddy, and looked after Schuyler's retreating footsteps, and shook his head.

A flock of students gathered around the captain. What did he think of Schuyler? Didn't Schuyler look as though he could pitch? How about those shoulders? Buddy forced a smile, and parried the questions, and wormed his way through the crowd.

"Going to take him down to the handball prac-

SCHUYLER IS JOLTED

tice?" Poole asked as they walked off together.

Buddy nodded. He knew why Poole had asked the question. At Fairview there was no chance for indoor baseball practice. In an effort to get into condition before outdoor work started, the candidates had taken to handball. For a week now they had been playing the game—but instead of playing on a court, they played in the cellar of the school. Buddy was sure that Schuyler would laugh when he saw the place.

But if this pleasant chap from Irontown was going to jeer, he might as well jeer first as last. When afternoon recitations were over, Buddy went in search of him.

"Handball?" Schuyler asked eagerly. "Sure. That's my middle name."

But when Buddy led him down to the cellar, a bored smile crossed his face.

The cellar was high-ceilinged enough, and there was plenty of light. Right there, though, the good side of the picture ended, for the school furnace with its ash cans and coal bins was at one end, and the janitor's mops and brooms were at the other.

"My eye," Schuyler chuckled. "Handball in a furnace room. That's a new one on me. I must write back and let some of the fellows at Irontown know."

Buddy flushed. His lips trembled to tell Schuyler a thing or two, but he controlled himself. First of

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all he was captain of the nine. He did not know what the future might hold. As long as there was a chance, even a slim chance, of Schuyler being of help, all else would have to be forgotten.

"This is an old building," he explained, trying to keep his voice steady. "When it was built, athletics weren't figured on. You know how all the old schools are."

"Oh, yes." Schuyler yawned and said he had better go home and study.

Buddy watched him climb the stairs. "I'll bet," the captain thought bitterly, "he's telling himself it's a joke."

But Buddy was wrong. Schuyler was telling himself that it was a tragedy.

Buddy turned to the handball practice. Schuyler, Schuyler, Schuyler! That was all the candidates seemed able to talk about. Not one of them appeared to remember that Arthur Stone, the dependable, was still with the nine. Buddy glanced hurriedly toward the pitcher. Was Arthur taking offense? No; Arthur, quietly bouncing a tennis ball against the brick wall, smiled without a trace of rancor.

"Gee!" Buddy thought with a lump in his throat. "If Schuyler was like that——"

But Schuyler wasn't, and that was all there was to it.

That night, when Buddy came to the supper table,

SCHUYLER IS JOLTED

he knew that Bob was watching him. Later, when he started upstairs to study, Bob followed him out to the hall.

"Did your pitcher show up?"

Buddy nodded.

"Well?"

"It isn't well, Bob; it's all wrong."

"I could have told you," Bob said slowly, "but I did not want to throw cold water. That day at the works he roasted Fairview to a turn. He said——"

"I know." Buddy tried to smile. "We've heard some of it already."

Bob put a hand on his shoulder. "What are you going to do?"

"Fight," the boy answered. "I'm going to try to make him see that Fairview is just as good a school as Irontown. I'm going to try to make him pitch for us the way Arthur Stone will pitch. If he gets the fellows down on him by his talking, I'll try to straighten things out some way and make him pitch for us, anyway."

"And if all that fails?" Bob asked.

"Then," Buddy said simply, "we'll go on fighting with Arthur Stone alone."

Bob's hand gripped his shoulder.

He went up to his room to study, but for a long time his books lay neglected in his lap. Looking ahead, all he could see was a succession of obstacles that had to be mounted. The first of these would

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be handball. As a member of the nine Schuyler would be expected to play. Buddy knew already what Schuyler thought of Fairview's handball arrangements, and he had a strong idea that Schuyler would blandly refuse to take part.

He was captain, with a captain's authority and all Fairview behind him. Yet here was a boy whom it might be policy to humor—up to a certain point. After that——

“We'll see,” said Buddy. Of all the different kinds of boys there were in the world, why had Fate sent him a boy like Schuyler?

In the morning, as he walked to school, Wally Hamilton met him.

“What's the matter with this fellow Schuyler?” the scorer asked excitedly. “He's knocking the school to everybody.”

“Is he?” It was all old news to the captain.

“Chowder, yes! He says that we're old fogies and a thousand years behind the times. Somebody's been telling him how badly we need a pitcher——”

“Oh!” Buddy was vitally interested now. “What did he say to that?”

“He didn't say anything. He just grinned and stuck out his chest. And somebody said it was a lucky day when he came, and he winked.”

A lucky day for Fairview? Buddy could have laughed.

SCHUYLER IS JOLTED

"You're not going to put up with this, are you?" Wally demanded.

Buddy thought a moment. "There's a lot of things you put up with," he said, "when you're captain."

"Well," Wally threatened, "I'm not captain and I'm going to——"

"Are you?" Buddy asked.

Wally looked at him a moment and then looked away. "All right, Bud," he said at last; "I'll keep my oar out."

Buddy walked toward the school. There were two counts now in the indictment against Schuyler. First, he didn't like the school; second, he liked himself. And Fairview fellows were singing that Fairview would win the flag without sweating.

When school was over for the afternoon Buddy went looking for the new boy. He found him strolling away with a group of his new classmates. Buddy stood on the school steps and made a trumpet of his hands.

"O Schuyler!"

Schuyler paused and looked back. "Yes?"

Buddy motioned to him to return.

Schuyler took his own sweet time about coming. For several minutes he continued to speak to those with him; then, rather indifferently, he strolled back.

"Want me, Jones?"

"Yes." Only the red in Buddy's cheeks showed

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that the other boy's tactics had struck home. "You are coming out for the nine, aren't you?"

"Am I?" Schuyler stared. "My eye, you fellows need me badly enough, I guess."

"We do," Buddy answered steadily, "provided you can pitch."

Schuyler's slow smile was very, very significant.

"We like to have our fellows in pretty good shape," Buddy went on, ignoring the smile. "That's why we play handball. So, if you're coming out for the nine——"

"Oh, now," Schuyler protested; "I don't need any of that. I have an exerciser at home. I swing the clubs and take a cold splash every morning."

"I take care of myself, too," Buddy pointed out, "and I play handball."

"Oh, well, you're the captain. At Irontown, Drake is the same way. A captain has to set a good example for the others."

"Every fellow has to set a good example, Schuyler. No shirking—everybody on scratch."

Schuyler frowned. He was annoyed. At Irontown these before-season preparations were all right. Irontown had the facilities. But here, in this little two-by-twice school, things were different. Besides, they needed him badly. They weren't going to make him do things he didn't want to do. They had to be nice.

"You tell the fellows how it is, Jones," he said;

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"about my home exercises and all that. They'll understand."

"I'm afraid they won't. If I excuse you I'll have to excuse others. We don't play favorites."

"Oh, go on and tell them. They'll understand."

Buddy's pulse quickened. Here, right at the start, was a place where he had to show iron. If he gave into Schuyler now, Schuyler would ever after hold himself above discipline. If he insisted, Schuyler might walk off and make a mock of his authority. If that happened, what then? It was a situation alive with the possibilities of disaster, but it had to be met.

"I'm sorry," he said. "If a fellow wants to make the nine he must do what's expected of him. That's the law here."

Something in the captain's voice made Schuyler narrow his eyes. "And if he doesn't do what's expected of him?" he asked slowly.

"He doesn't make the nine," said Buddy.

It was out. The die had been cast.

Schuyler swung around and took a step away from the school. Then, for some reason, he paused. He looked up at Buddy, looked a moment longer—and then dropped his eyes.

"Why, all right," he said. "I'll do it as a favor to you, Jones."

Buddy knew that it wasn't a favor to him at all. But he had won. That was what counted. He

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wasn't going to split hairs about the terms of the surrender.

They went down to the cellar. Nails had been driven into overhead beams. Before hanging his belongings, Schuyler ran his handkerchief over the place where his overcoat would rest. He seemed to be very angry about something.

"That's ash dust from the furnace," said McCarter, the shortstop. "It brushes off."

"Oh!" Schuyler's tone was sharp. "I didn't know. We weren't troubled with ash dust at Iron-town."

A little of that, Buddy thought, would go a long way. He watched the candidates to see how they took it. Hill, the third-baseman, grinned good-naturedly.

"Wait until you're here a while," he said. "You'll go home feeling that you ought to be sifted."

Buddy felt a flash of relief. If the squad refused to take Schuyler seriously that was something to be thankful for. It meant that Schuyler and the nine would not be at loggerheads. And perhaps, as the days passed, this attitude of the fellows would gradually curb the pitcher's tongue. Criticizing and finding fault are rather poor jobs when nobody pays attention.

The work had stopped when Schuyler appeared. Now it started again. Boys who had had enough donned their coats and retired to the stairs where

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they would be out of the way. Buddy split the others into two teams. The ball was hit against the wall. The game was on.

Long before Schuyler's side had scored its twenty-first point and won the game, the watchers knew that Arthur Stone was no longer the handball star of Fairview. Schuyler seemed able to make his returns from either the right side or the left. His drives were powerful, and he had a beautiful knack of making the ball connect an inch or so above the floor.

As soon as the game was over there was a rush from the stairs. Boys surrounded Schuyler and congratulated him on his playing. Arthur Stone mopped his face and smiled.

"You surely are a hard man to get them past," he said.

"Oh, I learned my game under proper conditions," said Schuyler. "Did any of you ever see the handball court at Irontown?"

The candidates shook their heads.

"My eye, but that is a court. I'll bring around a photograph and show you."

Buddy bit his lips.

"I'll bet ours has more ash barrels," said Ahrens, the substitute.

There was a laugh.

Schuyler flushed angrily. Before he could say anything, somebody raised a cry for a match be-

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tween him and Arthur Stone. Arthur shook his head.

"I haven't a chance, fellows."

"I'm willing," Schuyler said quickly. The good-natured banter had stung him. It wasn't showing the proper respect for the things of which he had spoken. He wanted a chance to show what Iron-town handball was. He wanted to rub it in.

But Arthur hung back. He was willing to admit that the new boy was the better player.

"Oh, come on," said Schuyler. "I'll go easy."

Slowly Arthur took off his coat. "There's no need of that," he said coolly.

Schuyler went into that game with a smile on his lips. The smile stayed there only through an effort of his will. He was master, yes; but by no such margin as he had planned. He didn't rub anything in. He played with all his skill and strength and speed, and he played that way because he had to to win.

Things had not gone at all right that afternoon and this was the last straw. He had come down to the cellar when he did not want to come. Why he had come he did not know. His talk of Iron-town had been brushed aside. And now this boy who would be his pitching rival was making him extend himself to the limit.

Presently the game was over. He tried hard not to show that he had been hard pressed.

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"Pretty good," he said, "for a fellow who never played on a real court."

"I knew I didn't have a chance," Arthur said.

Schuyler looked at him queerly, appraisingly. In a few minutes, when he had cooled, he put on his coat and vest and then his overcoat. Something seemed to be on his mind. He walked upstairs to the main corridor and then outdoors. He paused and ran a thoughtful hand across his chin.

Buddy came from the building. "Three-fifteen tomorrow, Schuyler."

Schuyler nodded absently. "That was a funny game," he said.

Buddy halted. "Funny? How?"

"Oh, every way. Stone knew he didn't have a chance—he said so himself. Yet he played his head off."

"What's funny about that?"

"Why, what's the use of playing so hard when you haven't a chance? I told him I'd go easy. What was he trying to do, catch me napping?"

"Oh, no," said Buddy. "Nothing like that. That's not Art's style. He just couldn't help playing hard."

"But when he thought the thing was hopeless——"

"That wouldn't make any difference to Art."

"No? Why?"

"Because he's a Fairview fellow."

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Schuyler looked incredulous. Was Jones trying to make sport of him?

"What's being a Fairview fellow got to do with it?" he demanded.

"Everything," said Buddy. "The Fairview spirit fights to the last ditch regardless of the odds."

"Oh!" said Schuyler. He became lost in thought. When he looked up Buddy was gone. Slowly he walked toward home.

CHAPTER III

SOWING THE SEED

AT Irontown Schuyler Arch had been an average high school boy, doing his classroom work willingly, enjoying his sports hugely. But coming to Fairview had robbed him of his sense of proportion. He felt superior to his new school. He felt that the code that had bound him at Irontown did not bind him here.

At Irontown he would never have dreamed of trying to dodge the work that team candidates did. He would never have dreamed of playing fast and loose with a captain's desires. Unfortunately, though, a score of babbling students had told him how important he was to Fairview's baseball hopes. For the first time in his life his hat began to seem too small for his head.

He had made up his mind as soon as he saw the cellar that handball was not for him. He, who had been used to better things, play handball among ash cans? Nothing doing! He had had a private opinion that nobody would force him to play if he let it be known how he felt about the matter. Wasn't he the pitcher the school had sighed for?

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Yet, he had played. What was more, he had been told to play tomorrow. And tomorrow, he knew, he would play again.

"It wasn't because Buddy threatened me," he told himself stoutly. At Irontown the baseball captain's slightest wish would have been his law. But he could not see how a captain in a little frame school could be classed with an Irontown captain. There had to be a difference. No Fairview captain could make *him*.

Yet, he had played. He could not understand it. It was a mystery—almost as big a mystery as the game of handball that had been played by Arthur Stone.

Buddy had said it was Fairview spirit. Schuyler couldn't see that. School spirit, he thought, had to have something to feed on—gym, locker-room, shower baths. Where could Fairview get such a spirit?

"My eye!" he said aloud. "It's hot air, every bit of it. It's a dinky little school. It has nothing. And as for winning that pennant——" He smiled broadly. Of course, he'd pitch his best whenever he was sent to the mound, but he did not think that Fairview had a chance.

His thoughts would have given Buddy Jones something of a shock. But Buddy did not know.

Next afternoon Schuyler brought to school a picture of the Irontown handball court. When the

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baseball squad came down to the cellar he showed it.

The majority of the candidates took an indifferent look. Buddy, watching, suddenly felt uneasy. Suppose the players became dissatisfied with their lot? He saw Pilgrim and Yost and McCarter stare at the photograph a long time—and then glance about the cellar as though making comparisons.

“Some difference, eh?” Schuyler asked.

Pilgrim nodded.

“And yet,” said Neale, the second-baseman, “we manage to give a good account of ourselves—even in handball.”

Schuyler was furious. This thing of making little of his ideas filled him with anger. He put the picture away, and on second thought took it from his pocket. While the players were throwing off coats and vests and collars he found nails and a hammer, and fastened the photograph to a joist.

“What’s that for?” Buddy asked at his elbow.

“They have views of the different schools tacked up in the Irontown gym,” Schuyler said easily. “I thought I’d start something like that here.”

“Oh!” Buddy contemplated the picture.

“Shall I take it down?” Schuyler asked.

Buddy shook his head. He thought he saw a fleeting smile cross Schuyler’s face.

All through the practice Buddy was filled with a sense of trouble. Somehow, that picture seemed to breathe a threat. When the work was over he

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dressed and started for home. Upstairs, in the main corridor, he felt for his pencils. They were gone. He went back to the cellar and found Pilgrim and Yost standing in front of the picture.

The pencils were on the floor. After Pilgrim and Yost were gone Buddy walked over to the joist resolved to tear the picture down. He knew now that it was a real threat, a constant reminder of the things that Fairview did not have. And yet, with his hand raised, he hesitated. Tomorrow it would be missed. There would be questions. Slowly he turned away and walked upstairs.

His eyes had been opened to the danger. The school, at first taking Schuyler's words with smiles and shrugs, might gradually come to accept his ideas. The fellows might begin to itch for shower baths, lockers, and a field house.

If that happened, discontent and grumbling were sure to follow. And if discontent came, good-by school spirit. Pride and faith and loyalty could not endure in dissatisfied minds.

Buddy might build castles, but he did not close his eyes to hard facts. Though he had dreamed of a pennant, he knew the difficulties that lay ahead. Fairview was small. The nine was shy of substitutes. An injury to one good player might put it out of the running. But in spite of all that he had dreamed.

He had based his hopes on school spirit—the same

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spirit that had struggled free of a tarnished past, the spirit that had driven out the ringers. He had expected it to get behind the team, to encourage the players to mighty deeds, to somehow make up for all the advantages that almost every other team in the league enjoyed.

And now came something that threatened to worm its way into that glorious spirit of Fairview and eat out its vitals.

As Buddy plodded home he met Poole and Wally. He told them what had happened that afternoon.

"The nerve of him," Wally howled. "Tacking up Irontown pictures. Why didn't you soak him in the eye?"

No attention was paid to the question.

"It's all right for him to talk of big things," Buddy said bitterly, "but why doesn't he consider us? We can't have big things. We're a small school. All we have is our spirit."

"Perhaps he doesn't believe we have that," said Poole.

Buddy swallowed hard.

"We'd have been just as well off if this fellow had stayed away," Wally blustered. "He'll wreck things——"

"No," said Buddy. "He can't wreck Fairview. In the end——"

"Chowder!" cried Wally. "I'm not thinking of ends. What about the pennant fight this year?"

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"Maybe that picture finishes him," said Poole.

Buddy had his doubts. In the past he had leaned on Poole's judgment. Now he began to feel that he was years older than the president of the A. A.

He was not surprised, as the days passed, to find Schuyler carrying himself just a little more stiff-necked than before. When ash dust showed on his coat, he said that it was a queer school that couldn't give its athletes lockers. When the players spoke hopefully of going outdoors and getting batting practice, he said that schools that expected to make a showing in a pennant fight ought to have indoor batting nets. Somebody asked what indoor batting nets were, and next day Schuyler brought another photograph and nailed it beside the first.

"Gee!" said a voice as students gathered around it. "They can have batting practice all winter, can't they?"

"That's what a school like this is up against," said Schuyler.

"The odds never make any difference to Fairview," said Neale.

A smile flashed over Buddy's face. Here was a worry that was passing. So far, not one of his players had shown any inclination to pay serious attention to Schuyler's flouting—not even Pilgrim or Yost or McCarter.

It seemed to Buddy that his days were made up of sudden hopes and sudden fears. Just at present

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hope had come to him again. He knew that Schuyler held everything at Fairview cheaply. Yet the pitcher, at handball, continued to be the liveliest player of them all. Suppose he was the same at baseball, dashing, peppery, full of a restless energy? Suppose he was a boy who threw himself into every athletic sport for the pure love of winning? And above all, suppose he could pitch?

Suddenly Buddy found himself impatient to get outdoors.

The day finally came when the nine went forth. The ground was damp and clinging. In spots the outfield was swampy. But the air was soft and balmy, a bright sun shone overhead, and baseballs were plunking into gloves with a sting. What mattered a wet, sloppy soil?

Buddy was here, there and everywhere. He got Ahrens to bat grounders to the infielders. A village boy who wandered along was coaxed into hitting to the outfielders. Schuyler said that it would be fine if they had a field house so that they could get into uniform without first going home. Today, though, there was not a soul to pay attention. Schuyler snapped on his glove and called for a ball. It was mighty hard, he thought, to make these fellows realize what very small potatoes they were.

The students came marching down to the field, singing:

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We'll get the county pennant and we'll get it good and tight,
We'll get it without sweating, it won't even be a fight——

Buddy grinned. Today the song did not seem so arrogant. If Schuyler had control——

Schuyler, apparently, had the ability to throw the ball high or low, out or in. And, for all of his conceit, he seemed to be quite level-headed once he found a baseball in his hands. Boys called to him to show a few tricks, but he coolly threw to Buddy and did not even increase his speed. Fifteen minutes after he started, he stopped and donned a sweater. He knew when he had enough.

"This is something like it," he said to Arthur. Privately, he was wondering just how good a pitcher Arthur was.

Arthur nodded. Out of the corner of his eye he had been watching the new boy. As soon as Schuyler's back was turned he hurried to the captain.

"He handles himself well, Buddy."

Buddy drew a deep breath. "If he'll only fight for us, Art, the way—the way——"

"I think he'll fight," the pitcher answered, "just for the sake of saying he won. Schuyler isn't the kind who likes to be a loser."

It wasn't all that Buddy would have liked. He would have preferred that Schuyler would fight because the fight was for Fairview. But any port in a

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storm. He ran in and took the bat from the village boy's hand. He felt that he had to hit something to let off steam.

Pilgrim's voice came faintly. "Hit it a socker, Bud."

The captain whanged the ball far over the outfielder's head.

Ahrens, hitting to the infielders, grinned. "Feeling good, Buddy?"

Buddy winked. He felt quite well, thank you. His hope was that he'd feel a whole lot better the day Schuyler and Arthur Stone began to use their curves.

But when that day came he didn't feel at all like prancing around. He was nervous and anxious. Many pitchers could control a straight ball but were apt to throw a curve ten feet over the catcher's head. Was Schuyler like that?

During the noon recess the news ran through the school that Schuyler was going to show his wares. That song about getting the pennant without sweating had a wild increase of popularity. Boys who had made up their minds to go to a moving picture matinee changed their plans and decided to go to the village field instead.

When Buddy came to the field after classes, his heart pounded against his ribs. The students were grouped in back of where he usually stood while warming up pitchers. Their presence annoyed him.

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"They'll get Schuyler flustered," he complained to Poole.

"Not Schuyler," said Poole. "He has the nerve of a goat. Look at him."

Schuyler, laughing and chatting with some of the students, was supremely unconcerned.

Nevertheless, Buddy wished that the students would go away. He strode out to his place and pulled on his mitt. Fairview had longed for a pitcher. Well, here's where she found out if she had one.

Arthur Stone and Schuyler began to throw. At first the ball came easily. By degrees it took on speed. Presently it was coming in with a powerful zip.

Buddy straightened up. "All right?" he asked.

"All right," Schuyler said coolly.

Arthur nodded.

The sound of infield and of outfield practice ceased. Buddy knew that the players were drawing nearer. He signaled to Arthur for a drop. Arthur pitched. Buddy returned the ball to Schuyler and once more signaled for a drop.

Schuyler's arm swept forward.

"Gee!" said a voice. "That's almost as good as Art's drop."

Buddy's pulse quickened. Arthur Stone's drop was his best ball, and Schuyler almost equaled it. This was a fine beginning.

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The captain signaled for out curves.

Here Schuyler showed up poorly. His curve, instead of breaking sharply, was of the old-fashioned roundhouse variety.

"I could hit that a mile," said a voice from the students.

Buddy felt a bit disappointed. He signaled for an "in." He knew what Arthur could do, and he did not pay much attention when Arthur delivered. Then Schuyler started his wind-up. Buddy crouched and waited.

A streak of white plunked into his mitt.

"Oh!" he breathed. Was it an accident? He returned the ball to Schuyler and called for that "in" again. Again it came to him—a streak of white.

Back of him arose an excited clamor. He paid no attention to the sound. His blood ran joyously. By all the signs, Fairview had found the pitcher she needed.

A dozen times the captain signaled for that curve. Arthur, smiling happily, had stepped behind Schuyler, where he could watch.

"That's some ball," he said.

Schuyler gave a slow, superior smile.

"Oh!" Buddy whispered to himself. "I'll wake up in a minute and find I'm dreaming." Just as Schuyler's curve broke in it also broke down. A down-drop. A fadeaway! Great Scott, think of a Fairview pitcher with a fadeaway!

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He was on fire to try it against real batting. He caught Ahrens's eye.

"Play second," he shouted. "O Neale! I want you to bat. The rest of you fellows take the field. Hustle, now."

They ran out, knowing what was coming. Buddy picked up his mask and adjusted it. Neale selected a bat.

"Pitch to this fellow, Schuyler, will you?" Buddy asked.

Schuyler walked calmly to the mound.

The crowd found eager places along the foul lines. Neale stepped to the plate. Buddy signaled for that in.

A streak of white! Neale struck so hard he spun all the way around.

"Wow!" yelled the watchers.

Neale looked surprised and stepped back to the plate. Schuyler grinned at him. Neale hunched his shoulders.

This time the ball seemed too far out and too high. Neale relaxed. The ball broke down and in, and crossed his chest.

"Strike two!" Buddy chuckled.

Neale nodded, and narrowed his eyes.

From the watchers came a rollicking chant:

We'll get the county pennant and we'll get it good and tight,

We'll get it without sweating——

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This time Neale judged the ball craftily. Choking his bat, he snapped quickly. Again he failed to hit. The students shrieked their joy.

"What do you think of it?" Buddy asked in a trembling voice.

The second-baseman spoke in a whisper. "It's a beauty, Buddy; it's a beauty. What won't he do to those other schools?"

Buddy felt like quitting practice for the day and turning things into a celebration. Fairview had her pitcher! But you couldn't form a winning nine by way of celebrations. He steadied himself and sent Neale to his place, and called in boy after boy to hit.

He began to mix the balls he signaled for—now a drop, now an out, now a slow ball, now that peach of an in. Occasionally the batters would flop the leather into a safe place. But the moment the fade-away was called for all signs of hitting stopped.

"Oh!" Buddy breathed. "When he pitches that in-curve in the pinches there'll be nothing to it."

He signaled Schuyler to quit and called for Arthur. Schuyler went over to the foul lines. Boys surrounded him and clamored to be near him. He smiled indulgently. There was a fight to see what boy could mind his glove. Schuyler's smile grew wider.

He watched Arthur. In fact, ever since that day in the cellar when they had played their handball

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match, he had had a vast respect for the other pitcher. He wondered if Arthur would mow the batters down as he had done.

Arthur didn't. They hit his offerings freely.

"Believe me!" Schuyler told himself. "I guess I'll be the whole cheese here." He moved down toward first base, and now his walk was a pronounced swagger. He did not stop to think that whereas he had been pitching at top speed, Arthur was taking things easy.

Half an hour later the practice ended. The students swarmed on the field. Quickly they formed a circle about the players. Somebody's voice called "Ready, fellows!" The school song swept across the diamond:

Come, lift your voices, let them ring,
To Fairview's praise and glory;
No stain shall darken any page
Of Fairview's splendid story.
Then here's to her, long may she light
The path of honor and of right.
Fairview, the bravest of the brave,
Long may her noble banners wave.

Though storms may threaten to engulf,
And tempests may arise;
Her courage will throw off the yoke
And break misfortune's ties.
Then here's to her, long may she light
The path of honor and of right.

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Fairview, the bravest of the brave,
Long may her noble banners wave.

The song ended.

"You ought to hear Irontown sing 'Men of Iron,'" said Schuyler.

In an instant Buddy's joy was soured. When everything was going so well, why couldn't Schuyler keep still? What was more, how could he listen to the school song sung in his honor and not feel an answering thrill?

Though the school had so far accepted Schuyler with a smile, Buddy was sure that comments as raw as this would make trouble. If that happened, what good would all the pitching skill in the world be? The canker of unpopularity would rob it of all its worth.

The captain looked around him quickly to see how many of the boys were angry. Neale's face was dark. Arthur Stone's eyes had clouded. Here and there among the ball players were looks of doubt and distrust. But the main body of students seemed to be having just as good a time as before. The slap at Fairview had made no difference.

Buddy drew back a step. Slowly he tucked the mitt under his arm and walked toward the road. After a while he felt Poole and Wally near him. He looked away.

On the field the celebration continued. Schuyler

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started for home. A score of boys went with him.

"Those fellows seem to forget that Art is a pitcher, too," Wally cried savagely.

Buddy did not hear. His eyes were on Schuyler's haughty back. He saw the new boy turn the corner and the crowd trail after. Another moment and they were gone.

Buddy faced his friends. "Did you notice—that?" he asked.

"They want what other schools have," Poole explained gently.

"They didn't want it last year," Buddy said.

"Schuyler wasn't here to paint pictures for them last year."

"But they can't have those things," Buddy cried. "It's impossible. They'll only make themselves dissatisfied, and then——"

"I know," said Poole.

Buddy wormed his fingers into the mitt. That hollow at the base of the thumb had received Schuyler's glorious curve. He studied the worn leather. Suddenly he yanked off the mitt and stuck it back under his arm.

"Fairview spirit!" he said bitterly. "Gee! what a lemon."

He swung around and strode away. Poole and Wally stood there and watched him go.

"Did you hear him," Wally whispered, "calling Fairview spirit a lemon?"

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"He doesn't mean it," said Poole. "He's been stung. He doesn't know what he's saying."

In fact, Buddy did not even know where he was going. It was blind instinct that led him home. He went around to the back and sat on the kitchen steps.

He had known all along that the odds were against Fairview in the pennant fight. He was the only catcher. True, Neale could go behind the bat, but that would leave a vacancy at second-base. If a player was shifted to second, that left a gap some place else. He had counted on school spirit to balance the scales—and now, apparently, school spirit was dead. The students could sing their school hymn and laugh when another boy dragged in Irontown. Oh, the bitterness of it!

Had Buddy expected something like this, he might have braced himself and been prepared. Instead, it had come out of a clear sky. He had caught that dazzling curve and his hopes had mounted. In imagination he had seen school after school going down to defeat. Now—— Now he wouldn't have given the fleas from a sick cat for Fairview's chances.

He was still sitting on the steps when Bob came home.

"Hello!" Bob looked at him a moment. "What's up?"

"Everything," said Buddy. He passed into the

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house and went upstairs to his room. He heard Bob say, "Hold up supper a few minutes, Mother, will you?" Then there was a step on the threshold and Bob was in the room with him.

"Let's have it," Bob said encouragingly. "Maybe it isn't as bad as you think."

Buddy tried to force a brave smile, and failed. He told of the things that Schuyler had said, and of the pictures nailed to the cellar joist, and of that day's climax to the practice. When he had finished, Bob sat staring at the floor.

"How does the nine feel?" Bob asked at last.

Buddy thought of Pilgrim and Yost and McCarter. Since the day he had found Pilgrim and Yost standing in front of the picture in the cellar there had been nothing to arouse his suspicions. Besides, Pilgrim had been the first recruit to come to him when he had started his war on ringers.

He thought next of Neale and of Arthur Stone—of how Neale's face had darkened that day and of how Arthur's eyes had clouded. He thought, too, of Hill and Linqvist and Carlson. They had all stood together before. He thought he knew them.

"The nine's all right," he said.

"Well——" Bob's eyes met his. "It's the nine that must go out and play the games."

Buddy sprang up and paced the room. Some heroic cord of his nature was touched and a surge of new courage swept through his veins. It was

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the nine that had to play the games! It was the nine that had to go out there and do the job! Even if the school drifted after false gods, even if the spirit grew lax, by some miracle the nine might hold together and fight its battles to the end.

Outside he heard the footsteps of boys tramping past the house. They began to sing:

Though storms may threaten to engulf,
And tempests may arise;
Her courage will throw off the yoke
And break misfortune's ties.
Then here's to her——

The song died away. Buddy came over to his brother's chair.

"As long as the nine holds together," he said, "there's a chance. We'll fight until the last game has been played. Some day, perhaps, when the fellows see us battling our way against odds, the old spirit of Fairview will come back."

Bob gave him a rousing thump across the shoulders. "You can do it, kid."

"If the nine holds together," said Buddy. His nostrils twitched. "Gosh!" he added; "I'm hungry—now."

After supper he consulted the schedule. A week later came the opening game with Saddle River. A week later and the battle would be on. A shivering thrill ran up and down his back.

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"County champions!" he murmured. It was a possibility, after all.

Next day, in his zeal, he itched to hurl the nine at its practice, to bring it to a high pitch of perfection. But the afternoon turned sluggishly warm. The players sweltered and soon became languid.

Buddy himself felt the heat. Sooner than weary the squad, he called the practice to a halt. There was a race for the shade of a giant oak tree that stood beyond the first-base foul line.

Stretched off on the ground the players chatted gayly. Yost cried exultingly that next week the big fight started. Carlson sat up straight.

"There's eighteen games on that schedule," he said. "How many must we win to have a chance?"

Several of the boys shook their heads and looked at Buddy.

"In the big leagues," the captain said, "the team that wins usually has an average of about .600."

Carlson wrinkled his forehead. "Six hundred! Then if we won eleven games——"

"Let's win twelve and cinch the pennant," said Neale.

Buddy's heart leaped. Here was the courage he counted on!

"That shouldn't be so hard," said Carlson. "If Art wins six games and if Schuyler wins six—— Hello! Schuyler is having a thought."

Schuyler turned his head lazily.

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"Bet you're wondering how many games you'll win," said Hill, the third-baseman.

Schuyler shook his head. "I was thinking," he said, "that if we had things at this school we'd be taking our showers now, and rubbing dry, and sitting around in the locker-room as cool as you please." He sprang to his feet. "Guess I'll go home and climb into the bathtub."

He walked off the field. All talk of a pennant stopped. Neale pulled a few blades of grass and looked at them thoughtfully.

"I wish we did have showers here," said Pilgrim.

Buddy gave a quick, startled glance. The outfielder flushed.

"I'm not finding fault," he protested.

But Buddy knew that the nine was beginning to break and drift.

CHAPTER IV

(A NOTE FROM CARROTS)

THE gathering under the oak tree broke up. One by one the players strolled away. Arthur Stone and Neale were the last to go. They stood for a moment uncomfortable, undecided, and then walked off without saying a word. But Buddy knew that they understood.

The next day was Saturday. Buddy had not called practice for the day. He was glad now that he had not, for he was in no mood for baseball.

He was spading the vegetable patch that afternoon when Poole and Wally came along. He dropped the spade and came over to the porch.

"Pilgrim has caught it," he said.

Poole looked at him quickly. "Schuyler?"

Buddy nodded.

"Good night!" said Wally. "You can ring down the curtain now."

Buddy's chin hardened. He was discouraged. There was no getting away from that. But as for quitting—— Somehow, every fresh discouragement seemed to give him an extra ounce of bull-dog grit. Slowly the feeling was coming to him that

A NOTE FROM CARROTS

this was a battle of wits—Schuyler trying to wreck the nine with false beacons; he trying to keep it off the rocks.

“Are there any others?” Poole asked.

Buddy nodded again. “Two, I think.”

“Two? Who are they?”

“McCarter and Yost.”

Poole whistled. First-base, shortstop and an outfielder. And added to that, a pitcher who might or might not be worth the powder to blow him up because his loyalty was weak.

“Are you sure about Yost and McCarter?” Poole asked.

Buddy admitted he was not.

“It doesn’t seem possible,” the president of the A. A. said slowly. “They were with us in the fight against ringers——”

“So was Pilgrim,” said Buddy.

There was a long spell of silence.

“Believe me,” said Wally. “I’d make sure about those two fellows.”

“I’m going to,” said Buddy.

He had already told Bob that the nine was divided. Now he decided to waste no time in finding out where he stood. Monday morning he loitered on the way to school until Yost and McCarter overtook him.

“Only two more days,” he said cheerfully. “Wednesday we play Saddle River.”

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The players nodded, but their eyes did not flame with the battle light. Yost said something about the small school being the under dog.

"All the more glory if we win," said Buddy.

"But——"

"Nobody thought about odds when the league was organized," Buddy interrupted sharply. "We were all glad to get in it."

Yost was silent. McCarter stepped into the breach.

"Look at those schools that have paid coaches, Buddy," he remonstrated.

"What about them?" Buddy demanded. "We knew they had paid coaches."

Yost took courage. "They have other things besides coaches; lockers, shower baths——"

Buddy's lips tightened. "Would you fellows be able to play better ball if you had lockers?"

"Well——" Yost began uneasily.

"It's this way, Buddy," said McCarter. "The locker-room belongs to the nine. It's theirs. It gives the players a different feeling."

"How do you know? We never had a locker-room."

McCarter flushed uncomfortably. "It seems that way, doesn't it?"

Buddy wanted to take them by the shoulders and shake them and say, "Schuyler's been telling you that, hasn't he?"

A NOTE FROM CARROTS

He restrained himself. To quarrel now would only make matters worse.

"Fellows," he said, "the big thing is that we want Fairview to win. Isn't that so?"

"Sure it is," McCarter answered eagerly.

"I guess yes," said Yost. He seemed glad that the conversation had taken this turn.

"And we'll work hard to make her win, won't we?"

"You bet," they answered together.

"Well," Buddy smiled, "what have paid coaches and lockers got to do with that?"

The question seemed to catch them napping. Buddy had hoped that they would speak right out and say, "Nothing to do with it." Instead, they seemed at a loss for words.

"Why——" Yost looked at McCarter for encouragement. "Nothing to do with it, I guess," he said weakly.

That faltering "I guess" sent a chill through Buddy's blood.

The danger was greater than he had feared. He had been frightened lest the nine lose that invisible something that spelled spirit. Now he knew that a gift even more precious was slowly dying. Two players, at least, were beginning to whine and to quit. They were rapidly losing faith in Fairview's chances.

Buddy paused outside the school steps. Schuy-

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ler approached, his books tucked under one arm. As usual, several students tagged at his heels.

"Hello, Jones," he said airily.

"Hello," said Buddy. The pitcher passed him. He had a mind to follow, to get Schuyler alone in a classroom, to try to show him the havoc he was creating. In the end he shook his head and stayed where he was. Schuyler would not understand. Schuyler would probably ask him, blandly, was it his fault that the school didn't have what other schools had.

Then, too, if Schuyler put thoughts of defeat into the heads of McCarter and Yost, wasn't that a sign that he, himself, doubted that victory could come to Fairview's banners? Would he doubt even while he was pitching?

"No matter which way I turn," Buddy thought miserably, "I'm up against it."

But there was no thought of surrender. The fighting lines formed about his mouth. He'd stick it out until the last game. That would be his motto. *Until the last game!*

Before the school bell rang he was planning. Schuyler had talked big about paid coaches. All right; he'd meet that. He'd get a coach for Fairview as good as any paid coach. He'd get Carrots O'Toole.

Carrots pitched Saturday afternoons for the Fairview B. B. C., a semi-professional organization,

A NOTE FROM CARROTS

and he had been offered a try-out by one of the teams in the State League. Long ago he had volunteered to help with the nine. Now the time had come to send for him.

The captain hurried inside. Before classes he scribbled a note. At noon he met Poole.

"Any word about McCarter and Yost?" the president of the A. A. asked in an undertone.

"They don't think the school has much of a chance," said Buddy.

"No?" Poole was surprised.

"They say the other schools have paid coaches——"

"Oh! Schuyler's work. What are you going to do?"

"Get a coach," said Buddy. He held out a note. "Will you leave that at Carrots's house?"

Slowly a smile crossed Poole's face. He took the note.

"Good boy," he said. "This ought to fix things. Carrots knows baseball from the home plate to center field."

"And the fellows know it," said Buddy. He walked home. *Until the last game!*

That afternoon, instead of warming up the pitchers at once, Buddy told them to wait a while. Schuyler looked surprised. Buddy went off where he could watch his infield.

It had always been a pleasure for him to see the

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way McCarter, at short, could get a ball and flip it to Neale at second, and the way Neale could whip it down to Yost at first base. Today, though, something was wrong. Twice McCarter fumbled, and once he threw past Neale. Buddy shook his head angrily.

"It isn't fair to the school," he muttered. "Why can't they see that?"

"Hello, Carrots!" somebody called.

Buddy whipped around. A tall, ruddy, red-haired boy was striding toward him. The boy grinned and waved his hand.

"I got your note, Bud," he said. "When does the season open?"

"In two days."

"Huh! Why didn't you send for me sooner? What's your first game?"

"Saddle River."

"Here?"

"No; at Saddle River."

Carrots whistled a moment. "They're a tough bunch to beat on their own grounds." He glanced about the field. "Who's that lad over there?"

"Schuyler Arch," Buddy answered. "He's a new student. He came here from Irontown."

"From Irontown, eh? What does he do?"

"Pitch."

"Yah!" Carrots took a glove from his hip pocket. "He's my meat. I'll look him over."

A NOTE FROM CARROTS

Buddy called the pitchers. Carrots lined up with them and began to throw. Schuyler flashed him a look of surprise.

"Hello, stranger," said Carrots.

"Hello," said Schuyler. His eyes ran from Carrots's head down to his shoes. They said quite plainly, "What are you doing here?"

Carrots chuckled. "I'm out here to look you over, son."

Schuyler was mystified. If this fellow was trying to make sport of him, he wouldn't get very far. The pitcher turned his back and gave his attention to his work.

As soon as the first curve was thrown Carrots dropped out of the line and put his glove in his pocket. Schuyler wanted to look around to see where he had gone, but he thought it would not be wise to show so much interest.

"A little more snap on that drop, Art," came the voice from the rear.

Art nodded.

Then:

"Try to get it down lower."

Schuyler glanced out of the corner of his eye and saw Art nod again. He watched when his companion pitched. The ball broke low.

"Fine," said the voice.

Schuyler could not imagine who this red-haired boy could be, nor why he should have so much to

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say. But then you could expect anything at a school where they played handball in a cellar.

Presently Schuyler had the feeling that Arthur was no longer under scrutiny, and that he was being watched. Buddy signaled for his "in." He threw it three times. Then that voice halted him.

"Put more of your body into it."

Schuyler looked around.

Carrots grinned friendly. "Don't pitch with your arm alone. Use your body, too. Give it all the steam you have."

Schuyler sent an inquiring glance at Buddy. Was he to take orders from this red-haired fellow?

"Come on," Buddy cried. "Shoot it."

Schuyler tried to obey and made a wild pitch.

"You'll be rusty at first," said Carrots. "Here; let me show you."

Schuyler watched Carrots use a body swing. There was no denying that Carrots threw with a graceful ease. The pitcher tried to imitate the motion. It was all new to him. Body and arm and wrist did not work together. The curve lost its speed and its sparkle. When the ball was thrown back to him, he caught it with a sulky clutch of his glove.

"Easy," said Carrots. "You can't grow potatoes overnight. Stick to your shooting. That will be some ball when you get it right."

A NOTE FROM CARROTS

Schuyler bit his lips with vexation. He'd like to tell this fellow a thing or two. But he didn't, principally because he did not know who the fellow might be. When the pitching was over he slipped on a sweater and stepped to one side.

From the foul lines he watched Carrots wade into the fielding practice. Every player jumped when he spoke. The mystery became greater.

By and by the practice ended for the day. Carrots called the players around him. He seemed to be lecturing on what faults he had observed. Schuyler, remaining where he was, waited impatiently. Finally the talk was over. The players scattered. Schuyler beckoned to Yost and they left the field together.

"Who's that red-haired fellow?" Schuyler asked.

"That's Carrots O'Toole," the first-baseman answered. "Haven't you heard about him? He used to play on our teams. He used to work on a peddler's wagon, but he saved his money last winter and bought an interest in the route. He's studying at home, and the high school teachers are always lending him books and helping him."

"Peddler's wagon," said Schuyler. "Has he no connection with the school?"

Yost shook his head. "No. He used to play on our teams, but when we abolished ringers——"

"He played with the teams and wasn't a student?" Schuyler demanded incredulously.

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"Sure. Nobody thought it was wrong in those days."

"And now he's—— Is he coaching the nine?"

Yost nodded.

"After having been a ringer?"

Yost nodded again.

"My eye!" said Schuyler. He drew a deep breath. "You wouldn't see anything like that happen at Irontown."

Up to this moment the first-baseman had seen nothing wrong in Carrots's association with the nine. Now, however, Schuyler had thrown about the whole matter a suspicion of sickening taint.

"Carrots knows baseball," Yost said weakly. He was stirred by a spark of loyalty to a friend—a very faint spark.

"A fat lot he knows," Schuyler retorted. "You fellows know what my in-curve is. Well, at Irontown they had a paid coach and he showed me how to pitch it. A paid coach ought to know something."

Yost nodded. Else why was he paid money?

"Well, Carrots wants me to pitch it differently. Just takes one look at me and wants me to pitch it differently. What do you know about that?"

Yost looked incredulous. "Gosh! Is that what Carrots was doing over there with you?"

"That's what. I guess a paid coach ought to know more than a fellow on a peddler's wagon."

A NOTE FROM CARROTS

"He ought to," Yost admitted. He had always regarded Carrots as a marvel of baseball wisdom. Now he began to have his doubts. A paid coach loomed in his mind as a person with powers above the average, with wisdom equal to that of a Solomon, with a judgment that was infallible. And as for Carrots—— Well, he had seen Carrots pitch and he had seen Carrots beaten.

"I'll stick to the way they showed me at Iron-town," Schuyler decided.

Yost became thoughtful. "But if Carrots insists——"

"My eye!" said Schuyler. "It won't take me long to ask him where he gets off. A ringer! He ought to be ashamed to show his nose on our field and the fellows ought to be ashamed to have him there."

"You won't say all that to him, will you?" Yost asked in alarm. Carrots's temper had never been any too steady.

"N—no," said Schuyler. He had been impressed by the red-haired boy's bulk. "But I'll tell him he doesn't rate as high as a paid coach."

Yost nodded. He was positive now Carrots's reputation was altogether too high, and he had an idea that somebody ought to speak to Buddy about it.

But the boy who would have gone to the captain at that minute would not have stayed long. For he and Carrots were walking up and down the field,

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and Carrots was showing his baseball sense by unerringly placing his finger on a sore spot—one sore spot, anyway.

“What’s the matter with McCarter?” he asked.

Buddy was startled. “Why?”

“He isn’t playing his old game. Where’s his pep? What has happened?”

Buddy evaded the question. He feared to tell Carrots the plight of the nine. He was afraid Carrots might say things that, while truthful, would not be any too encouraging. Just at present he was sure that he needed to keep a grip on all the courage he had. For one thing, it seemed that conditions must be worse than he had thought, else how had Carrots managed to see so much in one short afternoon?

“That fellow Arch is some pitcher,” Carrots said. “If he puts a body swing behind that curve he’ll have something.”

But Buddy could find no solace in news about Schuyler. Every time Schuyler gave a hint of promise, he destroyed that promise by some succeeding act.

McCarter’s fielding that afternoon had alarmed the captain. Of course, it may have been only a temporary let-down. On the other hand, it might have been the first indication of a general slackening. If it was the latter, would Yost and Pilgrim follow? Would they go off their game, too?

A NOTE FROM CARROTS

Day after tomorrow the season would begin. If Fairview began to lose at the start, she would probably be out of the race before the schedule was one-third played. In a pennant fight there was no such thing as saying, "Oh, well; wait until the next game." Every game was *the* game.

"After this," Buddy bowed grimly, "I'll work them hard. I won't give them a chance to think of anything but baseball."

He was resolved to lose no time. In the morning, when he went to school, he carried a ball and a glove. He found Schuyler sitting idly on the steps.

"How about trying that body swing?" he asked.

Schuyler arose lazily. "I'll warm up a bit," he said, "but nix on that body swing."

Buddy had been adjusting the mitt. He swung around. "What's that?"

"It's this way," Schuyler explained calmly. "At Irontown they had a paid coach. He showed me the delivery I use. Paid coaches ought to know something."

Buddy took off the mitt. There was no warm-up that morning. He was up against another stone wall. To compel Schuyler to use a delivery he had no confidence in would be to have him lose half of his effectiveness. He would then be a mark for the batters of other schools. And yet, to let him force Irontown opinions down Fairview throats——

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"Gee!" Buddy growled. "If it isn't one thing, it's another."

That afternoon he decided not to bother with the pitching until Carrots came. The huckster wagon, he knew, would be stabled at four o'clock, and Carrots would reach the field a few minutes later.

He batted grounders from the plate and directed the infield practice. As the minutes passed, he told himself that things were a little better. McCarter was not missing them today.

A few minutes past four o'clock Carrots appeared. Buddy hurried forward to meet him.

"I want to use Art tomorrow," he said. "Give him a good looking over, will you?"

"Sure. How's Schuyler boy making out? Been practicing that body swing?"

Buddy shook his head. Carrots looked at him, puckered his eyes, then grinned.

"Can't see it, eh? Finds it hard and gets discouraged? Can't get the break using the body swing and thinks he'll never get it, eh? We'll fix that. All he needs is a little courage."

Buddy said nothing. He took his place and the ball began to plunk into his mitt. When the curves began to break, he felt his nerves grow tight. What was going to happen in the next few minutes?

Schuyler delivered his in.

A NOTE FROM CARROTS

Carrots touched his arm. "Hello, there, son; what became of the body swing?"

"I'm not using it," Schuyler said coldly.

"So I see. Why not?"

"I was taught that delivery at Irontown by a coach. He was a paid coach and he knew his business."

"Oh!" said Carrots. He looked at Buddy, and shook his head, and abruptly gave all his attention to Arthur Stone.

"He knows he's wrong," Schuyler told himself gleefully. He was vastly relieved. He had had an idea that this red-haired peddler might be nasty.

All went well with the pitching until Arthur tried his drop.

"It isn't there today, Art," said Carrots. "Try again."

Arthur tried several times. Suddenly Carrots caught him by the arm.

"Does your wrist hurt?"

Arthur nodded. "A little. I was going through a classroom this morning and bumped it against a desk. It's nothing much."

But Carrots picked up his right hand and examined the wrist intently, pushing and prodding and twisting.

Buddy, anxious, had approached. Carrots took him aside.

"I'm no doctor, Bud. Just the same I wouldn't

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let him pitch for a couple of days if I were you."

"But I wanted to use him tomorrow. You know what Saddle River is when she plays at home."

"You're the boss," said Carrots. "If I were captain he wouldn't pitch. He might make that wrist good and sore if he uses it much. Can't you work Schuyler?"

Buddy looked down at his mitt and nodded—slowly.

"Is he troubled with it much?" Carrots asked.

Buddy still looked down. "With what?"

"Irontown."

Buddy hesitated.

"Is that what's the matter with McCarter, too?"

Buddy decided to own up. Besides, if Carrots was going to coach every day he would have to know all the team secrets.

Quickly Buddy told his story.

"How are you," Carrots asked; "game to fight it out?"

"I must," Buddy answered.

"Then let's dig in here and stir up the pepper. The way to beat hard luck is to chase it with an ax."

But all the pepper that went into the work from then on was of Carrots's manufacture. Buddy's spirits were dampened. He wanted to win that first game. A victory would start the nine off with a rush. A defeat would give it a chance to doubt

A NOTE FROM CARROTS

itself. And here he was forced to use Schuyler, a boy who thought that a school couldn't win without a paid coach, and lockers, and shower baths. Gosh! wasn't it tough?

The captain announced that Arthur's wrist would have to be rested for a day or two, and that Schuyler would pitch against Saddle River. The players, thinking of that in-curve and what it should do, threw up their caps and yelled. Buddy forced a smile. He wondered how many of the players would be cheering if they could see things as he saw them.

Next day the nine went to Saddle River by stage. Just before the start, a boy came running up with a letter for Buddy.

"Carrots O'Toole gave me this," the youngster panted. "He said not to open it until after the game."

Buddy stared at the envelope a moment and put it in his pocket.

All the way to Saddle River the players talked eagerly. Today the entire league went into action. Irontown played at Pompton, Garrison at Brunswick, Bloomfield at Lackawanna, and Hasbrouck at Gates. Every boy had his own idea as to what schools would win.

"Fairview will win," said Neale, "no matter what else happens."

"Sure thing," said Pilgrim.

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"We'll show Saddle River a trick or two," Carlson predicted. "She's a tough team to beat on her own grounds, but we're a tough team to beat on anybody's grounds."

Buddy drew a deep breath. If everybody felt like that—— His eyes searched the coach for Schuyler. He was down in a far corner talking to McCarter and Yost.

"If he'll only pitch," Buddy murmured. "If he'll only forget about paid coaches and lockers—and pitch."

Schuyler pitched. No captain could have asked more. For six innings he held Saddle River scoreless, and during that time Fairview accumulated four runs. The game appeared to be as good as won.

And then, in the seventh, something happened. Buddy, catching, could detect a difference almost from the time the first ball struck his glove. The speed seemed to be gone. The sharp break was no longer there.

Saddle River scored twice.

"He was entitled to one bad inning," Buddy told himself. On the rough pine bench that Saddle River provided for visitors he sat next to Schuyler and talked encouragingly. Schuyler listened in silence. When it came time for him to pitch the eighth, he threw off his sweater and stepped toward the mound.

A NOTE FROM CARROTS

The first boy greeted him with a double. Buddy's heart became as lead. When the next batter fouled out to Hill, the third-baseman, the captain cheered gayly. But he knew that Fairview's cause was shaky. Schuyler's delivery was becoming weaker and weaker.

The next boy singled, and then came a crashing three-bagger. The score was tied.

Buddy swallowed a lump in his throat. Grammar school boys could have hit what Schuyler was throwing now.

"Good-by, ball game," he said huskily. He wished he had brought Arthur Stone along.

Three more runs came in before the last boy was out. Wally Hamilton, scoring the game, shook his head sadly. He hoped that Fairview would tie it up in the ninth.

But Fairview didn't. She did not get a boy on base. What had looked like victory in the sixth by a score of 4 to 0 was defeat in the ninth by a score of 7 to 4.

As Carlson lifted a fly to right field for the third out Buddy turned from the third-base coaching box and walked to the bench for his sweater and glove. The players hurried toward the dressing-room. Buddy followed slowly after them, and Wally walked at his side.

"Chowder!" the scorer cried. "He was going great at the start. What happened?"

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Buddy shook his head.

"Did he——" Wally hesitated.

"You mean did he lose his nerve? No. When a pitcher loses his nerve he gets wabby. Schuyler was steady enough. One inning he had everything; the next inning he had nothing."

"But there ought to be a reason for it," Wally insisted.

Yes; there ought to be. But what that reason was Buddy could not even begin to guess. What was more, for the moment he was weary with disappointment. He didn't want to think about it at all.

They came to the dressing-room and opened the door. A voice came from inside, Yost's:

"We were up against it from the start," the voice said.

"Didn't we lead for six innings?" Neale demanded.

"Yes. But they had a paid coach. Didn't you see him sitting on their bench advising them? They have——"

Buddy strode forward. "Yost!"

The first-baseman gave a quick, frightened glance.

"We have Carrots," the captain said sharply.

"We always thought he knew baseball."

Yost dropped his eyes. Neale started to say something, checked himself, and began to throw his baseball things into a grip. Schuyler, adjusting a

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cravat in front of a wall mirror, apparently had no interest in what was happening.

The Saddle River dressing-room had all the luxuries of a big school. Buddy took his shower. The cold water cooled his fevered blood. Oh, the bitterness of hearing a Fairview boy whining that the other school had the breaks! The bitterness of a Fairview boy accepting defeat with weak excuses!

Buddy knew that he could thank Schuyler for this latest kink in his baseball plans. It was Schuyler's talk of paid coaches that had started Yost. For a moment, as he dressed, he again considered the advisability of going over and talking to Schuyler as boy to boy, of trying to show him that he was poisoning the nine. Then he gave up the idea. Talking to Schuyler would be like pouring water into the ocean—exciting to the pourer but absolutely without effect upon the ocean. Schuyler was one of those bland, blundering, maddening individuals who are always right.

Buddy would have preferred to ride home alone. But to ride home apart from the nine, after what had happened in the dressing-room, would be to invite gossip. He walked to the stage with the players. He went up front. Yost stayed far in the back.

Four hours ago the nine had ridden into Saddle River alive with hope and confidence. Now it was going back, beaten. Nor was that the worst. The

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boy who had been called upon to help coach the nine, to mold it into a winner, had been attacked, his knowledge flouted, his prestige dimmed.

Thinking of Carrots made Buddy think of something else. He put his hand in his pocket, found the letter that had been given him, and pulled it out. Inside the envelope was a note. He read it slowly:

Schuyler wouldn't use my body swing, so just watch and see if I'm right. His arm will tire. Along about the seventh or eighth inning he'll get his. See if I'm right.

Wally Hamilton edged close to the captain.

"Say, Buddy, how is Carrots going to help you if the fellows think he knows nothing?"

Buddy sighed, and shook his head, and put the note away.

CHAPTER V

THE FIELD HOUSE

THE news of the nine's defeat had preceded it to Fairview. When the stage came to a halt at the village post office, Poole was the only high school boy waiting. He clutched Buddy's arm and said that one game didn't mean so much, and that, anyway, there were seventeen more games left.

"More happened today than just losing a game," said Wally.

Buddy was in no mood for talk. He let Wally tell the story of what had occurred in the Saddle River dressing-room.

"Yost!" Poole cried in astonishment. "Did he make a crack like that?"

"He did," Wally answered. "He said that we must expect to get licked by schools that have paid coaches."

"He didn't say that," Buddy contradicted in a tired voice.

"He meant it," Wally flashed back.

Buddy was silent. He did not tell about Carrots's note. Some day he would stick it under Schuyler's nose. Not now, though. Schuyler would say that

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one defeat proved nothing. But some day, after he had been trounced two or three times—— Buddy winced. Two or three defeats would cut a big slice if Fairview hoped to win at least eleven of her remaining seventeen games.

He said good-by to Poole and Wally outside his gate. In the dining-room he found Bob and his mother already at supper.

“Win?” Bob asked.

Buddy shook his head.

“Bad beating?”

“No; Schuyler blew up in the seventh and eighth.”

Bob broke a piece of bread. “Anything else?” he asked shrewdly.

Now that Buddy was eating he felt more like talking. He told his story.

“I wouldn’t have minded,” he ended, “if Yost had made a dozen errors. He can play ball. I’d have taken his errors as just the luck of the game. But to have him whine and wilt—— I can’t stand for that, Bob.”

Bob nodded thoughtfully. “Got any substitutes?”

“One; Ahrens.”

“How is he?”

“Can’t hit.”

“Tough luck,” said Bob.

Buddy nodded. Yet, this thing of discounting Fairview’s chances, of destroying confidence, had

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to stop. Yost's treason could not go unpunished. He and every member of the nine had to be made to understand that Fairview demanded a whole heart.

"What are you going to do?" Bob asked.

"I'm going to drop Yost," Buddy answered slowly.

"For good?"

"No; until he gets the poison out of his system."

Bob smiled quietly. No bitterness or mean anger here. Everything for the good of the school. Aloud he said:

"It may mean lost games, Bud."

"It means lost games if the fellows begin to crawl."

"But you might be able to skin through this season."

Buddy shook his head. "That wouldn't be fair. That would be ducking. That would be leaving it for next year's captain to fight."

"But the pennant——" Bob began.

"This is bigger than the pennant," said Buddy. "Fairview's spirit is at stake."

Bob stood up. "Kid," he said, "you're going to win out. I can feel it in my bones."

"I wish I could feel it in mine," Buddy sighed.

That night Poole came around with news of how all the games had gone. Irontown had won from

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Pompton, Brunswick had beaten Hasbrouck, Lackawanna had defeated Bloomfield, and Gates had come out on top in a batting bee with Garrison.

Buddy made a record of the games. The president of the A. A. reached for his hat, turned toward the door, hesitated.

"Schuyler's back of Yost," he said meaningly.

"We can't fight Schuyler," Buddy sighed. "He's been too clever. Out at Saddle River he didn't open his mouth. He doesn't say things against Fairview. He just says things about Fairview."

"But this influence he's creating——" Poole began hotly.

"That's what we must fight," Buddy said. "We must make the fellows feel the same way about the school as they felt before Schuyler ever came here."

Poole looked at him a moment. "How?"

Buddy's jaw hardened. "I don't know—now."

And, somehow, Poole went away comforted.

Monday morning the captain posted this record on the high school bulletin board:

	W.	L.	PC.		W.	L.	PC.
Irontown	I	0	1.000	Pompton	0	I	.000
Saddle River..	I	0	1.000	Garrison	0	I	.000
Brunswick ...	I	0	1.000	Bloomfield	0	I	.000
Lackawanna ..	I	0	1.000	Hasbrouck	0	I	.000
Gates	I	0	1.000	Fairview	0	I	.000

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"Gosh!" said Yost over his shoulder. "You put us last and we're tied with Pompton."

"We belong in last place," Buddy answered. "Aren't we the school that's up against it from the start?"

Yost flushed.

"I'm making a change," Buddy went on. "I'm moving Neale to first base."

"Are you putting me on second?" Yost demanded. "I never played that bag."

"I'm putting Ahrens on second," the captain answered.

"Oh!" Yost realized that he was being benched. Slowly he turned and walked away.

At noon, when Buddy came from classes, Schuyler was waiting for him.

"Yost has been talking to me," the pitcher began blandly. "He feels pretty badly about being dropped."

"I feel badly, too," Buddy answered. "Yost and I have been friends. We've played together. I like him."

"Then why did you drop him?"

"I had to."

"Because he doesn't think Carrots is——"

"No," said Buddy; "because he lost his nerve and began to whine about schools with paid coaches."

"H'm!" Schuyler said thoughtfully. He stole a

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quick glance at Buddy and looked away. When he came to his corner he said good-by and hurried up the street.

"I wonder," Buddy muttered, "what he thought of that."

When the captain came back to school he found that the news of Yost's punishment had spread. The reason for it, however, was a mystery. Evidently Schuyler had kept that much to himself.

Buddy went his way unruffled. The clamor of the students did not disturb him. He had expected something like this, for Yost had been first-baseman for three years. When boys met him and protested that Yost was needed, he smiled. When other boys wailed that Ahrens couldn't hit and that Yost's bat would be missed, Buddy smiled again, grimly. Finally the students gave up trying to influence him, and tried to question Yost. The ex-first-baseman turned away sullenly and would have nothing to say.

When the players came to the field that afternoon Buddy called them together. An explanation, he felt, was due them; and besides, there were two players in particular whom he wanted to think over what he had to say.

"There are ten schools in the county league," he began. "Six of these schools have paid coaches. I don't want players who figure that those six schools have us whipped before the first ball is pitched."

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Neale gave a quick, emphatic nod. Schuyler looked up at the sky as though there was something there that interested him greatly. A faint color crept into his cheeks.

"Fairview," Buddy went on, "has played these six schools before. We have always held our own. We're going to hold our own again. The fellows who think differently are better off the nine than on it. We want fellows who are with Fairview from the first inning to the last."

Silence.

"That's all," said Buddy. "Now let's put some ginger into the practice. The first game has been played and lost. Forget it. Next time we'll do better."

The players scattered. The work began. Neale was a bit awkward in his new position, and Ahrens was nervous. Yet there was a noticeable snap to the work. McCarter seemed chastened. Once, when the ball was hit to him, he fumbled. Instead of taking his time and throwing the ball to the plate for another trial, he scrambled after the sphere with frantic speed and whipped it to first. He could not have made the play faster had a runner been tearing down the base path.

"I've saved him," Buddy whispered. "I've saved *him*, anyway."

Yost, a hard light in his eyes, did the nondescript work that falls to the lot of a substitute. He batted

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fungoes to the outfielders. When Carlson came in to hit them, he played in the outfield a while. Afterwards, while Arthur Stone pitched to the batters, he played the various positions as boys deserted their fielding stations and went in to the plate. At last it was his turn to hit. He picked up a bat, and gripped it with a clutch that whitened his knuckles, and drove Arthur's first pitch screeching to the outfield.

Those students who had come down to watch the practice looked at one another uneasily. This was the player who had been benched. As against this they contrasted the way Ahrens had tapped weakly in front of the plate.

Schuyler smiled as though something amused him. When the practice was over he waited for Yost.

"Don't worry," he said. "You'll be back there if you hit them that way. They'll have to use you."

Yost's lips twitched. "I'll show them," he said.

Carrots had not come to the practice. There would be days, of course, when he could not come—days when he would be delayed on his route or would have to go out into the country to see farmers about supplies. Yet, for all that, Buddy was uneasy. He had figured that Carrots would come out to talk about yesterday's defeat and about Schuyler's showing.

Arriving home from the practice, Buddy went up to his room and again read the note Carrots had written.

"We couldn't have a better coach," he said aloud. "Carrots knows things."

Sitting there, with the note in his hands, his courage grew stronger. With Carrots at his back he felt equal to the task of piloting the nine to victory. Carrots would be a rock wall of strength. The magic of Carrots's knowledge would smooth away their troubles. What difference did one defeat make with Carrots to help him? Anyway, they might not have had that one defeat if Schuyler had listened to Carrots's advice.

Next day Buddy went to the field hoping that Carrots would come early. The minutes passed, and the coach did not appear. Finally Schuyler hinted that if the pitchers were not going to warm up he would like to go home. At that Buddy donned his mitt and told Schuyler and Arthur to get ready.

Before a ball could be thrown Carrots made his appearance. Buddy called a halt. Schuyler, with his arm drawn back to throw, gave a grunt of impatience.

"I suppose we'll be kept here another half-hour," he complained.

"I imagine Buddy knows what he's about," Arthur answered tartly.

However, there was no half-hour wait. Buddy

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explained hurriedly that he wanted to pitch Arthur on the morrow. Carrots nodded and said he'd watch him. The captain went back to his place and the pitching began.

Ordinarily Carrots went about with a laugh and a merry quip. Today he was thoughtful and silent. Not once did he speak to Schuyler; and on those few occasions when he spoke to Arthur, his remarks were short and to the point.

Buddy wondered what could be the matter. As soon as the last ball had been thrown he hurried to the coach.

"How is he, Carrots?"

"You can use him tomorrow. His wrist is a bit tender, but he'll do. Don't call for his drop too often."

Buddy gave a quick nod. Here was one relief. He did not have to depend on Schuyler for the second game.

"I suppose you know how we made out at Saddle River?" he asked.

Carrots nodded. "Schuyler couldn't last with that delivery. He puts a lot of speed into it, and it's all arm work. The arm muscles get all the strain. They were bound to get tired."

"The paid coach at Irontown didn't see that," Buddy said loyally.

Carrots smiled. "That paid coach has his hands full. He has to coach football, baseball, basket

ball, and track. He can't know everything about everything. I wouldn't know how to coach track or basket ball."

"You can coach baseball, though, Carrots."

"I know baseball," Carrots said simply.

Oh, yes; Carrots knew baseball. Buddy thought that he was mighty lucky to have such powerful aid.

"We play home tomorrow," he said. "Could you——"

Carrots shook his head.

Buddy's face fell. "Gosh, Carrots, I hoped you'd be able to help us with this game."

"I can't do that, Bud. I'm quitting."

"Quitting?" The captain stared at him. "Quitting what?"

"As coach," Carrots answered.

Buddy's heart flopped down into his shoes. Schuyler refusing to take advice, Yost out of the game—and now this.

"I know what happened in the Saddle River dressing-room," Carrots went on. "This fellow Schuyler has a big head. Do you think if I had a job as teacher and wore swell clothes he'd turn up his nose at my coaching?"

"He hasn't done that, Carrots," Buddy argued weakly. "The only thing he said to me was that the Irontown coach had taught him his delivery."

"He said more than that to somebody," Carrots

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insisted. "Do you think Yost would take a crack at me if somebody didn't put it into his head?"

Buddy was silent. What was there to say?

"I'm sorry, Bud." Carrots held out his hand. "I hope you clean up. But I can't stay around here. I'd be chasing that fellow Schuyler off the lot in jig time. Then where would you be?"

"Just where I am now," Buddy said miserably. "In the soup." He shook hands with Carrots and turned away. He did not want the huckster boy to see that his eyes were blinking.

Slowly, as he walked home, his fists clenched. If he had Schuyler before him this minute—— He relaxed his hands. This wouldn't do. Fighting wouldn't help him. He had to go ahead, clear-brained, calm. He wasn't a Fairview captain for nothing. The school expected him to grapple with difficulties and solve them. But the school was making it very, very hard.

A block from home he met Wally and Poole. He told them that Carrots had quit, and why.

"Chowder!" cried Wally. "I'd like to twist Schuyler's nose three times around his neck."

"This must stop," said Poole.

But how it was going to stop Buddy did not know. That night, after supper, he told his wretched tale to Bob.

"Let's see," Bob said. "Tomorrow you play Brunswick. How does she stand?"

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"She beat Garrison last Wednesday," Buddy answered.

"Has she a coach and lockers and all the frills?"

"Yes."

"Then, if you won and if the fellows began to say you didn't need coaches to win——"

"Ah!" Buddy took a deep breath.

"I wouldn't count on it too strongly," Bob warned.

"N-no," said Buddy. He looked up quickly. "But I'm counting, just the same. Gosh, Bob! I've got to count on something."

Next afternoon he led his nine on the field realizing that a crisis had come. A second defeat, coming on top of the first, would surely start a chorus of, "What can you do against these schools that have all the advantages?" On the other hand, a victory might sweep the school about face and restore confidence overnight.

Buddy saw Yost watching him with a strained look on his face. He knew what that look meant. Neale was not a master first-baseman. Ahrens could not hit. Yost was wondering whether, at the show down, he would really be kept out of the game.

In truth, Buddy would have given much to see Neale back on second and Yost back on first. But he had gone too far to turn back now. Come what might, the lesson had to sink in—into Yost, into

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Schuyler, into the nine. When the infield lined up for its fifteen minutes of practice before the game, the captain saw a look of astonishment come to Schuyler, and a look of gloom to Yost.

"I guess they know now that I mean it," the captain muttered. But it was hard to play Ahrens. He wanted that game so badly.

When he warmed up Arthur Stone his heart was in his throat. But as Arthur, cool, self-possessed, began to use his curves, the captain's pulse became calm. If Arthur would pitch like that in the game——

Arthur did. In the first inning he was good; in the second inning he was better; and after that he kept improving right along. Brunswick could do nothing with his delivery. When the sixth inning closed, three dots in Wally Hamilton's score-book showed that she had acquired but three hits. Not one of her players had reached second base.

And while Brunswick struggled in vain, Fairview pounded the ball hard enough to do damage. A home run from Neale's bat in the third inning brought one run. In the fifth, with two runners on the bases, Ahrens created a sensation by ramming out a double. Both runners scored.

"Come on," yelled the Brunswick coaches when the seventh inning started. "She blows up in the seventh and eighth."

Schuyler, watching the game, flushed.

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But Arthur did not blow up. Three boys faced him in the seventh, four in the eighth, and only three in the ninth. He had pitched shut-out ball.

The victory seemed to go to Neale's head. He threw his glove into the air and turned a handspring. Next he ran to Schuyler and caught him by the arm.

"How about it, Schuyler?" he demanded. "We're not so bad for coachless wonders, are we?"

"No," said Schuyler; "not so bad." He jerked his arm away and hurried from the field.

But the players and the students had taken up Neale's cry. The Coachless Wonders! Brunswick had come with her coach and had been licked. 'Rah for the Coachless Wonders! What was the matter with Fairview? She was all right.

Neale caught Buddy's eye and winked. For a moment the captain stared. Then, as it dawned on him that Neale was deliberately trying to create sentiment, he suddenly plunged into the crowd. What Bob had said was coming true. He signaled to Poole, and the president of the A. A. followed him into a side street.

"Come on," the captain said breathlessly. "I want to get the scores of the other games. Hear Neale back there? He's doing that deliberately. I want to have something that will help him first thing in the morning."

"How?" Poole asked, puzzled.

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"By posting a new standing of clubs. Don't you see it? I put Fairview last after the first game. Now she's won. The chances are that some teams that lost Wednesday lost again today. We'll go up. Suppose, instead of being last tomorrow, we're fourth or fifth——"

"Oh!" said Poole. "I know where we can get a telephone."

He led the way to the butcher shop where his mother bought her meats. From the tradesman's telephone they called the Irontown High School. A boy answered the summons. Did he have the results of the games?

"All except Fairview," he answered.

"This is Fairview," said Poole. "We won 3 to 0."

"Good for you," said the Irontown boy. "Just a moment, now. Want the scores?"

"No. We can get those later. Just tell us who won."

"All right. Irontown beat Gates, Saddle River beat Lackawanna, Pompton beat Hasbrouck, and Bloomfield beat Garrison. Got it?"

Poole said he had, and called a "Thank you." Buddy paid the telephone charge. Then, taking Poole's notes, he lost no time in reaching the street.

"It's half an hour before supper," he said. "Come around to my house and help me get this ready."

Twenty minutes later the table was prepared:

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W. L. PC.			W. L. PC.		
Irontown	2	0	1.000	Bloomfield	1 1 .500
Saddle River..	2	0	1.000	Gates	1 1 .500
Fairview	1	1	.500	Pompton	1 1 .500
Brunswick	1	1	.500	Hasbrouck ...	0 2 .000
Lackawanna ..	1	1	.500	Garrison	0 2 .000

“Fairview in third place,” cried Poole. “Thunder, Buddy! This ought to keep the pot boiling.”

Buddy thought so, too. In fact, deep down in his heart he had a suspicion that the tide had turned.

Early next morning he posted the standing of the clubs. Boys surrounded it and talked excitedly. Irontown and Saddle River were only one game ahead.

“Not so bad for the Coachless Wonders,” said Neale.

Buddy, for the first time in weeks, felt satisfied. Even without Carrots it might be possible to make a showing. But his joy was short-lived. Poole, who had been watching something out on the school grounds, followed him into the hall.

“What’s Schuyler up to?” the president of the A. A. asked. “He’s out there talking to Yost and Pilgrim. There’s something in the wind.”

“Can’t he talk to them?” Buddy demanded.

“Yes; but he’s showing them a paper secretly. You know, Schuyler doesn’t like this Coachless Wonder stuff. It makes him look cheap. It robs

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him of a chance to make excuses for his defeat. If Art can win, the fellows will soon be asking why can't he win."

It seemed to Buddy that Poole was borrowing trouble. How could Schuyler detract from a victory? And yet, for all of that, sharp anxiety took the place of the satisfaction he had felt. What was the paper that Schuyler had shown?

At noon he knew. It was tacked to the bulletin board directly under the standing of the clubs:

We, the undersigned, members of the Fairview High School Athletic Association, hereby call a special meeting for this afternoon immediately after classes.

SCHUYLER ARCH,
CHARLES PILGRIM,
ALFRED YOST.

That was as far as Buddy read. Those first three names seemed to spell trouble. He found Poole, but the president of the A. A. had not the least idea what the call meant.

When Buddy returned to school after dinner the situation was unchanged. Only Schuyler and a few of his friends knew what was in the wind, and they were silent and secretive.

Buddy had an inclination to ask Schuyler what it meant. Poole advised against it.

"It's the first time the reason for a special meeting has ever been kept secret," Buddy argued fret-

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fully. "We've just won a game. We've just found our feet. If anything starts now——"

"Wait until it starts," said Poole.

When classes were dismissed that afternoon the students crowded into the assembly hall of the school. Presently Schuyler came in and took a seat well down in front. Poole arose and rapped the meeting to order.

"We are ready to transact business," he announced.

Buddy watched to see who would explain the call for the meeting. It was Schuyler who arose. The captain's heart gave a quick, heavy beat.

"I am a Fairview fellow," said the pitcher, "and I want to see Fairview have what other schools have. You know how things are. Fellows don't want to play ball in their good clothes. When classes are dismissed they run home, and get into uniform, and come back to the field—and sometimes there's something to do at home and they don't come back. That isn't the way a school team should be. The players ought to have a place for dressing, a place where they could keep their things, a place with school flags and all that. They ought to have a place that means Fairview to them every time they see it."

The assembly room had grown quiet. Buddy held his breath.

"It's the school that has things," Schuyler con-

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tinued, "that amounts to the most and has the most fun. You saw the standing of the clubs. It's posted on the bulletin board. Two teams are tied for first place. They haven't lost a game. Each of those teams has a locker-room and a gym and all that goes with it."

"So has Brunswick," said Neale.

Poole pounded his gavel. There were cries of "Silence!" "Schuyler has the floor," and of "Let him speak."

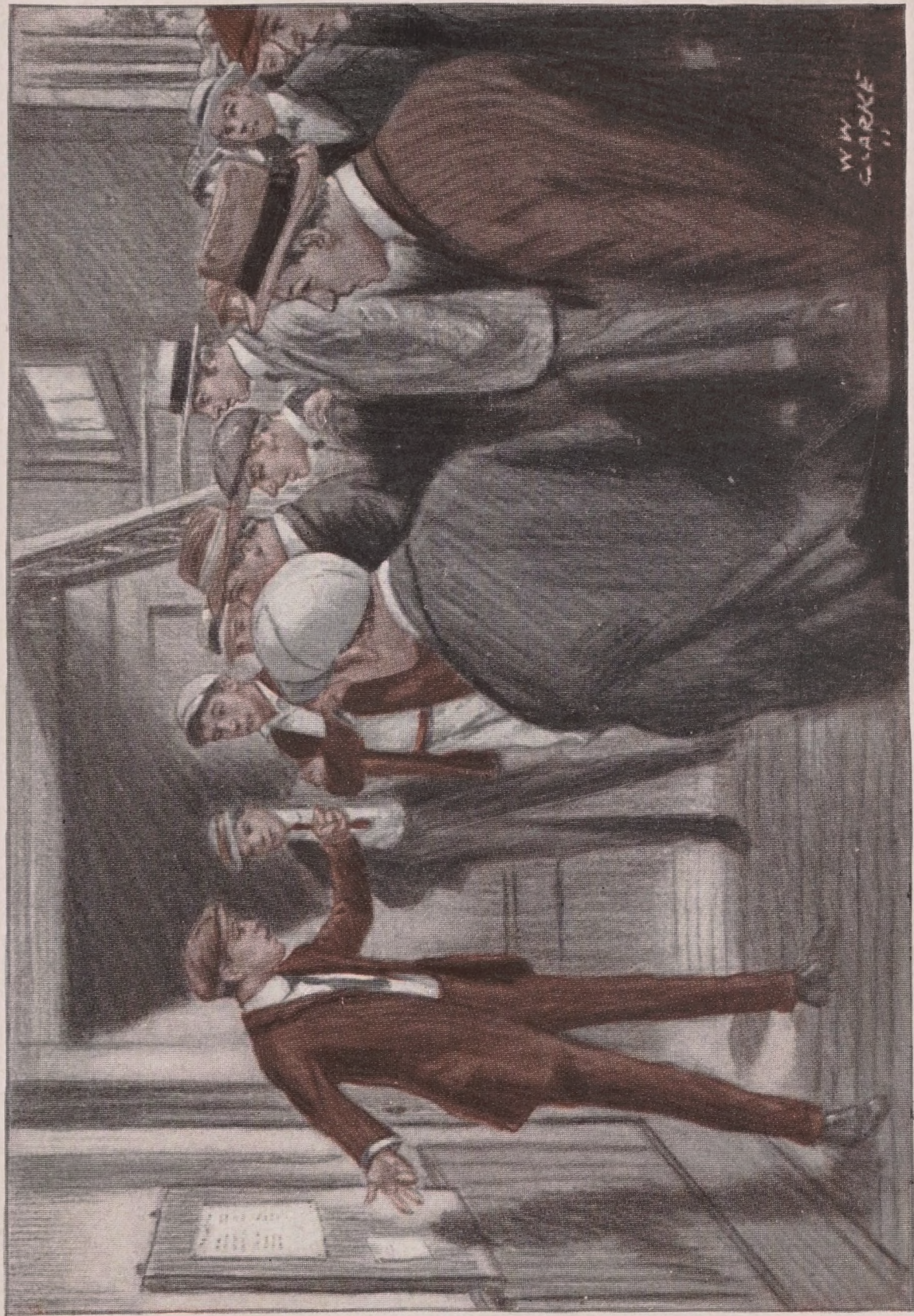
"Neale thinks I'm knocking Fairview," Schuyler went on. "I'm not. If you haven't got what you want, I don't believe in folding your hands and letting it go at that. I believe in getting things. A field house would be fine for the players. It would be a place for them to keep their uniforms, a place to dress. There's no reason why we can't have a field house if the A. A. says yes."

"Who'll get it for us?" a voice demanded.

"I will," said Schuyler. "My father is superintendent at the iron works. They have a shack about twelve by fifteen feet. It has no foundation—just a pine floor laid over the ground. There's no further need of it at the foundry, and my father said we could have it. We can move it down to the field and use it for a field house."

A babble of talk swept the floor. The imaginations of the students had been touched.

Buddy felt lost. He did not know what to do.



"I'm a Fairview fellow, . . . and I want to see Fairview have what other schools have."

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Neale looked at him questioningly. Wally hurried over and sat beside him.

"This is dynamite," Wally panted.

Poole banged his gavel and brought order. A student moved that Schuyler's offer be accepted with thanks. Wally jumped to his feet. He did not know what he was going to do, but he was resolved to delay action as long as possible.

"Won't we have to get permission to put it on the field?" he demanded.

"I have permission," said Schuyler smoothly.

"How much will it cost to move the shack?"

Schuyler smiled. "Nothing. The fellows can lift it on to one of my father's flat trucks."

Cheers sounded from all parts of the assembly room.

Wally swallowed hard. He was, apparently, making Schuyler's position all the stronger. While he hesitated, wondering what next to say, Neale's voice broke in.

"I don't see the need of all this hurry," Neale said.

Wally had his cue. He moved that the matter be left open until tomorrow. While Schuyler glared, he argued that the shack ought to be inspected. There wasn't much money in the A. A. treasury, and maybe the roof would be leaky. A committee ought to make an inspection.

"That's fair," said Neale.

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"Oh, all right," said Schuyler. "Look at it if you want to."

There was another cheer. Poole appointed the committee, naming Wally as chairman.

It was a sorry lot of ball players that Buddy commanded that afternoon. Boys who had thus far fought shy of Schuyler's ideas now began to show interest. What would a field house look like? How would it be fixed up inside?

Buddy cut the practice short. He had seen Wally and Poole waiting, and he knew that the committee had finished its inspection. He hurried from the field and joined his friends.

"They'll take it," Wally reported gloomily. "They're wild for it."

Buddy did not ask how the field house looked. He did not care. Yesterday the nine had beaten Brunswick. The cry of Coachless Wonders had seemingly stifled all dissatisfaction and discouragement. The standing of the clubs, with Fairview in third place, had been hailed with enthusiasm. And now, a few hours later, everything was topsy-turvy again.

Had the field house come to the school in an everyday sort of way, Buddy would have welcomed it. He knew that it would save time and thus make possible a longer practice period. But he knew, too, that it would not come in an everyday sort of way. Schuyler would color the trans-

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action. His talk in the assembly room had shown that. He would create the bubbling impression that Fairview had taken the first step, and that lockers and a gym and showers ought to follow. The school would once more be off in full cry for something that they could not have. The dissatisfaction would return.

"Look here!" cried Poole, "why can't we tell the meeting tomorrow——"

"We can't," said Buddy. "The school wants this field house. As a field house it's all right. It's what that field house stands for that is going to do the damage."

"Couldn't you tell them that?" Wally asked.

The captain shook his head. "They wouldn't understand. Besides, did you hear what Schuyler said about the two teams that lead—that they have locker-rooms and all the advantages? How are we going to explain that?"

"Schuyler is shrewd," said Poole.

"Yes," said Buddy. His eyes grew hard. "If I thought he sprang this field house just to have an alibi when he loses games——" The captain paused. "I can't believe that. It's just that he's bug on having things on a grand scale. He doesn't stop to think how he may be hurting the school."

"Well," Wally demanded, "why don't you take him aside and tell him."

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"That wouldn't do any good, either," Buddy sighed. "He believes in going out and getting things. That's what he said. That's what he'd tell me."

There was a long interval of silence. Each of the three boys was busy with his own thoughts.

"Believe me," said Wally, "we're up against it. Things were bad enough when Schuyler was only talking, but now that he's getting away with something—— Good night."

"I'd like to drop him down a sewer," Poole said vindictively. "He comes here with his airs, and his swagger, and his big talk, and he turns our peaceful little school into a revolution."

It was the first time that Buddy had ever seen Poole go off the handle like this. He walked home depressed and gloomy. Oh, what wouldn't he give for Carrots's advice now!

In the morning, after a night's sleep, he felt better. The school had squeezed its way out of other troubles. Perhaps she would squeeze out of this. Besides, all was not lost. Of course, there was a big chance that the school would go crazy over the field house and be swept with a frenzy of bravado. On the other hand, the fellows might learn that a field house was merely a field house, just as a classroom was merely a classroom.

That afternoon, when the A. A. met again, the committee reported. Boys cried out that no school

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was going to have anything on Fairview. A voice moved that the house be accepted.

Neale stood up and looked at Buddy. When the captain made no sign, he sat down, disappointed.

"All in favor say aye," Poole ordered.

The ayes arose in a shout.

Buddy had taken a seat back near the door. The moment the vote was over he left the room. The die was cast. For good or for evil, Fairview had chosen her road.

CHAPTER VI

THE FIRST BREAK

THE practice, that day, lasted until a flat truck came down the road surrounded by cheering boys. Then baseball stopped. Players stuffed gloves into their pockets and ran to meet the vehicle. Even Neale, moved by a spirit of curiosity, joined in the rush.

Resting on the truck was a roughly-built shack. The door was locked. There was a window on either side and one in the back. The players demanded to know how it looked inside and craned their necks to see in through the glass. But the glass was thick with dirt and they could see nothing.

Schuyler took charge of the arrangements.

"Right here, John," he said, with an air of importance.

"Yes, sor," said the driver. "Whoa!"

The horses stopped.

"Now then, fellows," Schuyler demanded, "where shall we put it?"

At that there was a shout for Buddy. The cap-

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tain approached slowly. He would like to have welcomed that field house with a can of oil and a match, but prudence dictated that he make a show of interest.

"We want to get it where foul balls won't smash the windows," he said.

Schuyler agreed. After much discussion a site was selected.

"Get at it, fellows!" Schuyler called. "Lend a hand, John!"

The driver got down from his seat. The shack was worked toward the rear of the truck. Thirty boys caught it, lifted it, swung it clear. Then, haltingly, heavily, they carried it in from the road, and eased it down on the ground.

"Is that all, sor?" said the driver.

Schuyler said that it was. From his pocket he took a key and approached the door. A moment later the entrance was wide open, and Schuyler was waving an inviting hand.

"This way, fellows," he said.

They crowded in. Twelve hooks were set in each wall at intervals.

"Those hooks weren't there yesterday," said a voice.

"I had them put up," said Schuyler. "Every player gets a number, and the hook that corresponds to that number is his."

There was a murmur of admiration.

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Schuyler swelled visibly. "Of course," he said, "I don't want to dictate, but we play a game tomorrow and we ought to have things in shape. Those windows need cleaning, the floor must be swept, and we ought to have some old chairs here for the fellows to sit on. Then some school flags—— What is the Fairview color?"

"That's a nice question," said Neale.

"Blue and white," said another voice. "Go on, Schuyler. What about it?"

"Why," said Schuyler, giving Neale a superior smile, "we ought to nail up school flags and bunting. We want the place to look classy. Who'll volunteer to clean up?"

There was a roar of "I will." Neale scowled, and swung around, and stalked out. Soon Buddy followed.

The captain walked down the road with his head bent thoughtfully. At the A. A. meeting Schuyler had said that he was a Fairview fellow. Yet, a moment ago, he had asked what Fairview's colors were. And he was beginning to puff out his chest and lord it.

Buddy sighed. The future looked none too bright. He heard the sound of running feet and looked back. Neale was hurrying to overtake him.

"What do you think of that?" Neale asked, motioning back toward the field house.

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Buddy hesitated. Was it wise to tell a member of the nine how he felt, even though he be a friend?

"All right," said Neale. "I know. You're captain. You have to swallow a lot of things to keep peace. But let me tell you this: the day you get ready to fight, let me know. I'm with you."

He swung around and walked away. Buddy looked after him and shook his head.

"I'd like to fight and stop it now," he said, "but I can't."

That night he studied the schedule. The morrow's game was with Garrison, and Fairview had the advantage of playing on her own field. Thus far Garrison had been easy picking. Gates had beaten her and so had Bloomfield. If she displayed no more vim tomorrow than she had shown in her other engagements, there was no reason why the Blue and White should not win.

But—and there was a big but—how about Schuyler tiring after seven innings? It was his turn to pitch.

Buddy wanted that game. Another victory would mean just that much more confidence. If Fairview won, and if either Irontown or Saddle River lost, the team would be tied with one of the leaders. On the other hand, a defeat would send the team down in the league standing.

The more Buddy thought of it, the more impera-

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tive it seemed that that game be won. He folded the schedule, and put it in his pocket, and sat in thought for a long time.

"I'll use Arthur," he said at last. "I can't take a chance on Schuyler now." After a moment he added: "I hope he doesn't get sore."

At that very moment Schuyler was directing the finishing touches at the field house and telling himself that tomorrow he would enter it wearing a crown of victory. Yost had brought an abandoned hanging lamp, a dozen boys had discovered forgotten chairs and benches in their attics, and there had been a perfect flood of flags and bunting. When the last Blue and White banner was tacked into place, the boys stepped back to view the result.

The place had been transformed. The windows had been cleaned, the floor had been soused with countless buckets of water, and the walls had been wiped down. The flags and bunting stood out gayly. Only the empty hooks seemed to hint that something was lacking.

Schuyler, while the boys watched, took a satchel from under a chair. He opened it, took out his uniform, and hung the clothing on a hook.

"'Rah for Schuyler!" yelled a boy.

Schuyler laughed and colored, and pretended to make light of the cheer. But all the way home his blood tingled. Buddy Jones might be the captain

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of the nine, but today's doings had made him a school leader. He had four years to spend at Fairview, and he did not intend to spend them in a dull, drab way. Now that the field house had been secured, bit by bit he would lead the school on until it had all that it now lacked.

Today he had come into the limelight. Tomorrow he would monopolize the glare. It was his turn to pitch. Garrison was weak. She had lost two games. He ought to be able to win easily. Though he had said nothing to the students, that first defeat rankled.

Next morning he took a cold bath, and thumped and kneaded his right arm until it was a vivid red. He had an idea that this would do wonders for his pitching muscles. During the course of the day he confided to several boys that they'd miss something if they did not come to the field that afternoon, and when they asked him what he meant, he winked knowingly.

When classes were dismissed that afternoon the whole school went down to the field. When the Garrison players arrived, there were cries of "Hello, Fairview; what are you up to?" "Where did you get the field house?" "Some class to this, what?" "Better than dressing down in the high school basement, eh?" "Fairview's getting a wiggle on, isn't she?"

The students tried to look as though they were

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used to all this. Yet, in almost every Fairview breast, a proud heart beat.

Schuyler was in his glory. All this was adding tremendously to his prestige. When he beat Garrison, it would surely be the end of a perfect day.

"I guess we opened their eyes," he said to Buddy.

Buddy nodded. There could be no doubt that Garrison had been impressed.

"We'll make a good job of it," Schuyler added. "They won't get to me the way Saddle River did."

Buddy's eyes narrowed. "I'm pitching Art," he said.

Schuyler stared at him a moment and then flung his glove on the ground. Stooping suddenly, he picked it up and stalked away. Fifteen minutes later, when he was called to warm up with Arthur, he came to his task sullenly.

"Favoritism," he told himself. "When the weak team comes along, Stone is sent in there to make the record."

As soon as the warm-up was over he walked away. The benches had been brought from the field house. He sank down on the farthest end. This was the thanks he got for giving the school a field house and for starting it on the right path.

His eyes swept the field. Yost, as substitute, was taking what crumbs of the practice came his way.

"More favoritism," Schuyler grunted.

When the game started, he hunched his shoulders

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and stared somberly. Yost walked in and sat beside him.

"I thought you were going to pitch today, Schuyler."

"My eye!" Schuyler snapped. "What can you expect when the captain has his friends to take care of?"

Yost gave him a startled glance.

The first inning is always a trying one, for the pitcher has had no chance to warm to his task. Today, Arthur ran into trouble with the first pitched ball, and after that the trouble kept growing. Two singles, a base on balls, an error by Ahrens and two outfield flies did the damage. Three runs were scored before the last out.

Arthur came to the bench looking worried. The players chirped encouragingly and told him that Garrison wouldn't get another run. Of all the Fairview boys Schuyler alone was silent. He stared at the ground and told himself under his breath that it served them right.

Buddy lashed his players to the attack. Garrison, he told them, was easy. Gates had routed her and so had Bloomfield. They could do it, too. Come on, everybody; get into the game.

For five innings, however, it looked as though Garrison was going to withstand all assaults. Twice, once in the second inning and again in the fifth, Fairview had had chances. But each time it was

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Ahrens who had come to bat in the pinch, and each time Ahrens had been unequal to the task. Yost came to the bench from the coaching box and hung his head.

And then, in the sixth inning, just as Buddy's lips were beginning to twitch anxiously, the break came. McCarter, first up, was hit with the ball. Neale walked to the plate swinging a big, black bat.

Yost, from the first-base coaching box, tried to talk to both Neale and McCarter at once.

"Take a lead," he yelled. "A little farther. *Look out!* Pickle it, Neale; pickle it! Watch his arm, Mac; watch his arm! *Now!*"

The pitcher hurled the ball. Neale's bat crashed into the white sphere. Leftfielder and centerfielder began to run back.

When the shrieking and the cheering died down, McCarter was over the plate and Neale was resting on third. Yost, in the coaching box, showed that it was possible for a perfectly healthy boy to throw a dozen fits a minute.

Four more hits in a row finished the Garrison pitcher. By that time five runs were in and the game was safely tucked away in Fairview's bat bag.

"When I'm three runs behind I bet they won't hit in runs for me," Schuyler scowled. He was sour and glum. The record now was Arthur Stone two games won—Schuyler Arch one game lost.

The final score was Fairview, 8; Garrison, 5.

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Arthur had eased up in the last inning and Garrison had scored twice.

As soon as the umpire called the last out, Schuyler jumped up from the bench, strode to the field house and yanked off his uniform. The after-talk of the game did not interest him. He started out alone; then, seeing that Yost was almost dressed, he waited.

Presently he and Yost were out in the road. Schuyler wrenched angrily at his tie as though he could not get it to fit satisfactorily about his neck.

"Well," he said, "I see friend Arthur got away with it, thanks to luck."

Yost said nothing.

"I'm not getting a square deal," Schuyler burst out. "This was my game. Do you know why I didn't pitch?"

Yost shook his head.

"Because Garrison was easy. It was a chance for Arthur to boost his record."

"Gee!" said Yost. "I'd take it as an honor if I were a pitcher and they saved me for the hard games."

This was a new way of looking at the matter, and it didn't please Schuyler at all. He wasn't after that type of glory. He wanted individual honor. What credit could you get pitching the hard games for a team that would probably lose its hard games? He continued to complain; but after a time,

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seeing that Yost was paying no attention, he became silent and his face took on a look of offended reproach.

In truth, Yost had begun to think. Today had opened his eyes. He knew what it must have cost Buddy to see Ahrens failing when runs were needed. And yet, Ahrens would probably be kept in the game throughout the season. Yost bit his lips, and glanced at Schuyler. The pitcher caught his eye.

"Favoritism," he exploded. "I suppose Jones will be telling the school that Arthur is the only pitcher he can depend on."

"Well," said Yost, "Art has won two games."

"Why shouldn't he?" Schuyler cried excitedly. "If somebody picked all the soft places for me——"

"Oh, bunk," Yost said wearily. "Tell it to the marines."

Schuyler gave a horrified gasp. "W-what's that?"

"It isn't so," said Yost, "and you know it."

Schuyler was stunned. Could this be the disciple who had accepted his theories with respect to paid coaches and field houses? Could this be the fellow who had been benched, thrown out of the game, discarded?

"My eye!" Schuyler managed to say. "You've changed your tune. How about the square deal you got?"

"I got what I deserved."

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"What?"

"You heard me. If I were captain and a player laid down on me, I'd can him. I laid down—in thought, anyway. I got what was coming to me. Good night."

Schuyler's feet automatically led him around a corner. He was scarcely conscious that the former first-baseman had left him. When he came to his house he sat on the porch steps. Had Neale taken a savage crack at him he would have passed it off with a shrug of the shoulders. He did not think that Neale liked him, and from Neale occasional harsh words were to be expected. But to have Yost kick his shins—— He shook his head helplessly.

It was not until after supper that his depression passed. Then his thoughts became tinged with alarm. Yost had been one of his earliest converts. If they should split now, the school would ask questions. And he had no longing to have the school know that he and Yost had quarreled on a question of Buddy's square dealing.

Next morning he hunted up Yost to make his peace. The first-baseman, after a few words, made an excuse and got away. Schuyler's face went red.

Buddy, walking toward the school entrance with a paper under his arm, saw Yost turn away. Then he saw the red in Schuyler's cheeks. A quick throb

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of hope ran through him. Instantly he strangled it. He refused to build air castles—yet. Yost on the outs with Schuyler was one thing. Yost offering the kind of game that Fairview demanded was another matter entirely. And besides, they might not be on the outs at all.

The captain tacked the paper to the bulletin board. It was the standing of the teams after the third set of games:

	W.	L.	PC.		W.	L.	PC.
Irontown	3	0	1.000	Brunswick ...	1	2	.333
Saddle River..	3	0	1.000	Gates	1	2	.333
Fairview	2	1	.666	Bloomfield	1	2	.333
Lackawanna ..	2	1	.666	Hasbrouck ...	0	3	.000
Pompton	2	1	.666	Garrison	0	3	.000

There was a noisy outburst of talk:

“Oh, shucks! Irontown beat Hasbrouck and Saddle River beat Brunswick.”

“Well, we won, too, didn’t we?”

“Yes; but we’ve got to do better than hang on when they’re ahead.”

Buddy turned away. He didn’t like that last remark. And then a voice halted him:

“We’ll hang on until they tire, and then we’ll go ahead.”

It was Yost who had spoken. Buddy walked thoughtfully to his classroom.

For the rest of the day he kept his eyes open. He

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soon suspected Yost and Schuyler were no longer the friends of old. And he also noticed that whenever a group of boys began to speak of Arthur's two victories Schuyler immediately left the gathering.

"Jealous," said Buddy to himself; "and sore."

Schuyler was worse than sore. He was disgruntled and grouchy. When he came to the field house after classes, the place was jammed with students all talking at once, and another group was clustered about the door. For the most part they spoke of Arthur's pitching. This time Schuyler could not flee. He had to stay and listen.

And, the more praise of Arthur he heard, the greater became Schuyler's choler. Little things annoyed him greatly. He didn't have room to don his uniform in comfort. A boy brushed against his hook and knocked his trousers to the floor. At other times he would have taken all this with a laugh. Now, though, his nerves were tight and his temper was raw. What was this, a field house for the nine or a meeting place for every Tom, Dick and Harry in the school? Why, even at night when the lamp was lighted, there would always be a gang of students in the chairs and about the table.

The boys began to drift out. Presently the baseball players were alone. Pilgrim fastened his belt and prepared to go out.

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"Lock that door, will you, Pilgrim?" Schuyler snapped. "From the inside."

Players paused in their dressing.

"I have something to say," Schuyler told them.

Had he taken time to think he would never have said what was in his mind. He was a boy who liked popularity. But being side-tracked yesterday, and having broken—almost—with Yost, and then hearing about Arthur all day had robbed him of his usual discretion.

"We brought this down here," he said, "as a field house. Instead of that it's a club. If we, as members of the nine, want to talk about signals, or secret plays, or anything like that, we have to go out in the road to do it. There's always a crowd in here. It isn't right. This place is ours."

There was a silence.

"Well?" Neale asked.

"I move we make this place for the nine only," Schuyler went on. "Other schools have places that are reserved for the athletes. We ought to have one, too."

"Why?" Neale asked; "because the other schools have it?"

"No," Schuyler answered coldly; "because it's our right. Suppose we cooked up a scheme for playing any one game. Every fellow in school would know about it. And they'd be whispering and nudging one another all through the game, and

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the other fellows would be wise in no time. I move that we make this place for ball players only."

Buddy's mind was quick to see the danger. If the students were excluded, they would speedily charge that the nine was stuck up. Instead of coming to the games and cheering on the players, they would hang back and become indifferent.

Neale touched his arm. "Hasn't the A. A. got the say about this field house?" the player whispered.

Buddy shook his head. School money had not paid for it. It belonged to the nine—and the nine could make its own rules.

"But Holy Mackerel!" Neale whispered hoarsely, "if they pass this——"

"I know," said Buddy. He faced the room squarely. "Fellows," he called, "the school will get sore if we do this."

"They're Fairview fellows, aren't they?" Schuyler demanded.

Buddy stiffened. "You bet they are."

"Then they'll support the team, won't they?"

Buddy felt that he was trapped. What could he say? That they wouldn't support the team? That would be an attack on the students, and tomorrow it would be reported all through the school.

"Of course," said Schuyler, "if Jones is ordering us not to pass my motion——"

It was another master stroke. Buddy could not

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afford to play dictator. He stepped back and shook his head.

"I'm with Schuyler," said Pilgrim promptly.

Neale voted no. So did Yost. So did Buddy and Ahrens. But the others stood by Schuyler. The field house was theirs.

Pilgrim unlocked the door. The players passed out. Schuyler stayed behind and scrawled a few words on a sheet of paper.

The students who lined the field showed a disposition to cheer every good play. But of good plays there were very few. The practice faltered and limped. When it was over the players broke for the field house. The students followed.

They found a paper tacked to the door:

FOR BALLPLAYERS NO OTHERS ADMITTED

Boy after boy crowded forward and read it. The gathering was strangely quiet. One boy tore down the paper and stepped into the house.

"Does this go?" he asked.

The players looked at Schuyler. The pitcher wished that somebody else would do the talking.

"I'm sorry," he said, trying to create the impression that he was a good fellow and this pained him. "It's been found necessary. Just for the present, you know."

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The boy, evidently, cared nothing about necessities. He backed out and spoke to his companions. The crowd melted away.

Neale looked at Buddy. The captain forced a smile and tried to hide his worry. A new crisis had arisen.

Next day less than a dozen students watched the practice. There were no cheers. The boys looked on—merely that—and after a while wandered off.

By this time Schuyler had awakened to the fact that he had done a very foolish thing. At school boys snickered as he passed. He had found a card in his desk with "Stuck-up Lizzie" written on it. His popularity was rapidly melting away. He was no longer the hero who had created a field house. He was the fellow who had frozen out the students.

Schuyler blamed Buddy for his troubles. If Buddy had pitched him in his turn there would have been no words with Yost, no talk about Arthur's two victories, no reason for him to lose his temper. He glared across the field house at the captain.

Buddy did not notice the look of hostility. The captain had troubles of his own. The school, apparently, had turned away from the nine. Where there had been harmony, there was now dissension and a divided house.

A group of boys paused outside the field house and looked in at the open door.

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"Stuck-up Lizzies," shouted one.

They scurried away. They were grammar school boys, not high school students. Their cry, nevertheless, showed in what scant esteem the nine was held. Yesterday, cheers. Today, derision.

The captain was glad that tomorrow's game, the fourth on the schedule, would be played at Lackawanna. To play at home, with the students feeling as they did, would be to invite slaughter. Imagine the nine trying to play ball with boys standing around and calling them stuck-up Lizzies! Buddy sighed. For all he knew conditions might not be a bit better when the next at-home game came.

He had formed the habit of studying the schedule in his room as though expecting it to tell him what was going to happen. Tonight, after supper, he studied it again. It seemed to favor Irontown. Tomorrow she crossed bats with Bloomfield, and Bloomfield, since the season started, had been able to beat only Garrison, the tailender.

Fairview, on the other hand, had a tough opponent in Lackawanna. Lackawanna's pitching was only fair, and her fielding was nothing extra. But, judging by the games she had already played, she could swat the ball to all corners of the lot.

Buddy blinked his eyes and stared at the wall. He was sorry now that he had not sent Schuyler against Garrison and saved Arthur for this. He

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could picture Schuyler tiring after six or seven innings. It wasn't a pleasant picture.

"I won't wait for the runs to come in this time," Buddy vowed. "The minute I see him wilting I'll rush in Arthur."

Downstairs the hall bell rang. Buddy heard Bob go to the door. There came a murmur of voices. Presently Bob climbed the stairs and came into the room.

"Arthur Stone called," he said.

Buddy jumped up. "Send him up. Where is he?"

"He couldn't wait. He had to get home. He told me to tell you that he has to help his father tack up chicken wire tomorrow. He won't be able to go to the game."

Buddy dropped into his chair. Schuyler going to pieces in the closing innings—and nobody on the bench to stem the tide!

"Hard luck," he told himself miserably after Bob had gone, "surely likes me."

But, though he might waver, the iron in his nature seemed to strengthen with each new difficulty. At present he was planning a way out—a desperate way out. He would fall back on Ahrens, the hopeless. He would warm up Ahrens in the hope that he might possibly have something beside his glove. If Schuyler went bad, Ahrens could be used to try to halt the attack.

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Next day, when the nine left for Fairview, Poole and Wally were the only students who went along, and Wally had to go because he was official scorer. A handful of high school boys had witnessed the start, but the usual cheer had not sounded. Only one cry came after them and that was "Stuck-up Lizzies!" shouted by a grammar school lad who danced on one foot and wriggled his fingers derisively.

The ride to Saddle River had been comparatively gay. The ride to Lackawanna was almost gloomy. Mr. Davis, the Latin teacher, who was Fairview's official umpire, closed a book and came back to where Buddy was seated.

"There seems to be a coolness, Jones," he said.

"Yes, sir," said Buddy.

"Has there been any trouble?"

"The nine passed a resolution barring students from the field house."

"Oh!" Mr. Davis took off his glasses, polished them, and put them back on his nose. "Did you approve of that, Jones?"

"I——" Buddy looked away. "I back up my players," he said. He did not say that he had talked against the resolution; he did not squeal at his hard luck. But the teacher, wise in the way of boys, understood.

A broken trace delayed the nine, and it was late when they reached Lackawanna. The players ran

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to the Lackawanna gym, dressed, and then hurried to the field.

"Ahrens!" Buddy called.

The second-baseman paused.

"Warm up with Schuyler."

An angry red began at Schuyler's neck and spread up to his forehead. What was Buddy trying to do, let everybody know he was expecting another seventh inning blow-up?

Buddy pretended not to see the wrath in Schuyler's face. "Yost!" he called.

The first-baseman darted forward.

"Play second for a while."

Yost turned, slowly. He knew he wasn't going into the game. If he was, he would have played first, and Neale would have gone back to second.

Five minutes after that warm-up started, Buddy's plan had been shot to pieces. Ahrens was as wild as a Kansas cyclone. To put him in would be madness. All the Lackawanna batters would have to do would be to pull their hats over their eyes and wait for the umpire to tell them to take their base.

"All right, Ahrens," he called. "Go back to second."

A sudden smile lighted Schuyler's face. He had seen Ahrens' wildness, and now he thought that Buddy had sent Ahrens away for fear others would

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see it, too. His movements became aggravatingly careless, and there was a cocksure twist to his shoulders.

"Oh, you fool!" Buddy told himself under his breath. "Let's see how long that swagger will last."

It lasted for seven innings, during all of which time Fairview held the lead. Then, in the eighth inning, Schuyler began to wilt. Four hits brought three runs, and the lead was gone.

During the first half of the ninth, Schuyler sat on the bench and kept moistening his lips with his tongue. If the fellows would tie the score or give him a one-run lead, he'd win that game for them. He knew he would. Why, it was only 7 to 6. Just one little run to tie it up!

When Ahrens struck out, he told himself savagely that they had batted in runs for Arthur. He also asked himself hotly why Yost wasn't in the game to help him out. Just at that moment he was sorry that he had ever mentioned paid coaches to the first-baseman.

Carlson got his base on balls. Schuyler sat up hopefully. Then Linguist hit a two-bagger, and the pitcher jumped to his feet with a yell. Linguist on second and Carlson on third! He turned pleadingly to the captain:

"Hit it, Buddy." It was the first time he had forgotten to call the captain a stiff, formal "Jones."

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"Bring in those runs and I won't give them another hit."

Buddy brought in the runs. His line single sailed over the shortstop's frantic fingers. The score was Fairview 8; Lackawanna 7.

Schuyler hoped that there might even be another run in store for the Blue and White. But on his own weak splash, Buddy was thrown out at second, and Pilgrim fouled to the catcher.

Schuyler went out to the box with his head held high. This was something like it. He'd mow them down with that fadeaway. In a few minutes the game would be over.

He wound up and pitched. The batter hammered the ball to center for a single.

Schuyler's muscles twitched. He nodded to Buddy's signal for a drop and pitched.

"Ball one!"

His offering had been wild—so wild that it had hit the ground in front of the plate, and the runner had dashed to second. Schuyler set his cap, and hitched his trousers. This would never do. He'd have to fall back on his fadeaway. Of course, now and then a batter would hit that delivery by accident, but——

But there was no accident about the way this particular Lackawanna batter hit it. He drove a rousing liner past McCarter, and the tying run was in. Pilgrim, with no chance to stop a score, made a

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useless throw to the plate, and the runner scooted from first to second.

"What's the matter with that pitcher?" he asked Ahrens. "He blew up that way at Saddle River, they tell me."

Ahrens didn't know.

Nor did Schuyler. His nerve was gone. Beads of sweat stood out on his forehead. The palm of his hand and his fingers were damp. He caught Buddy's signal, and threw, and plunked the ball into the batter's ribs.

The Lackawanna rooters screeched joyfully. Buddy walked down with the ball. Schuyler scarcely heard the encouraging words the captain spoke. His arm was so tired!

Back to the mound he went. Suddenly, as he looked at the batter, he knew that he was beaten. He tried to pitch with some of the skill that had been his in the early innings. The bat swung out.

He turned his head to watch the flight of the ball. It struck in front of Carlson, a clean, sure hit. Schuyler took off his glove and walked from the field. The game was gone.

Not for a moment did he think of the team. His thoughts were all of himself. *He* had lost. *His* record was bad.

Behind the plate, Buddy took off his mask and his chest protector. He was weary, weary, weary. If Schuyler had taken Carrots's advice, if he had

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learned to save his arm, Fairview might now have four games won and no games lost. She would be with the leaders. Instead, she was back in the ruck again. This morning she had been tied for third place. This defeat would probably set her back several notches.

During the ride home the captain sat next to Poole and Wally, but had very little to say. He watched the players. They were listless. This thing of Schuyler losing out at the end of games that seemed won was getting on their nerves. It was something they did not understand. And because it was full of dark mystery, it filled them with fear. Would Schuyler keep on blowing up like that? They looked at Schuyler with the question in their eyes, and Schuyler turned his head away and pretended to be interested in the passing scenery.

Buddy stirred and sighed. Poole bent his head.

"Speaking to me, Buddy?"

"No; I was thinking."

Poole gave a significant nod. "Schuyler's thinking, too."

"Sure he is," said Wally; "about himself."

Buddy said nothing. What was the use of discussing Schuyler? There were weightier matters. The nine was going back beaten, discouraged. If the school would slap it on the back, and tell it to cheer up—— But the school, in all probability, wouldn't do anything of the kind.

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The stage rolled into Fairview and stopped at the post office. The players swung to the ground. Not a student was there to ask them how they had fared.

In a straggling line they walked up Main street. Two boys came out of a grocery store carrying parcels.

"Who won?" they asked.

"They did," said Pilgrim.

The boys grinned. When the players had almost reached the next corner they broke into a shrill cry:

"Y-a-h! Stuck-up Lizzies!"

Buddy smiled grimly. Fine welcome to give a team that needed nothing so much as a few words of good cheer.

"As a proposer of resolutions," Neale's voice said distinctly, "Schuyler is one prize lemon."

Buddy waited for the storm to break. But for once, Schuyler had no reply ready.

After supper Buddy went out to see how the other teams in the league had fared. He telephoned to the Irontown High School hoping that somebody would be in the gym. Central reported that there was no answer.

He wandered aimlessly, and at last his steps led him toward the village field. The lamp in the field house was lighted. Every now and then, across the windows, black shadows moved.

Buddy stopped short. That shack, looking so

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peaceful in the quiet spring evening, was responsible for two-thirds of the worries that harassed him tonight. If the students had not been excluded, they would have been down at the post office tonight waiting to welcome the nine home.

If that resolution could be rescinded—— Buddy shook his head. No chance of that while the players were willing to follow Schuyler's lead.

A form loomed up in the darkness. Buddy spoke. "That you, Pilgrim?"

"Yes." The outfielder halted. "How did the other teams make out?"

"I won't know until tomorrow."

Pilgrim whistled under his breath. A shadow fell across the window and stayed there. They knew those shoulders. Schuyler's.

"Going to the field house?" Buddy asked.

"No," Pilgrim said slowly. "I—I'm not stuck on it any more."

"No?" Buddy tried to keep his voice steady.

"No. I can't play checkers with Smithy because he can't come there any more. And Reynolds can't come in with the puzzles he clips from newspapers and magazines. If I go to the field house there's nothing there except——except——"

"Yes," Buddy encouraged.

"Except Schuyler," was the answer.

Buddy's blood raced. Was this the first break? A majority of the players, led by the pitcher, had

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brought student wrath down on the nine. Had one of that majority cut away?

The captain spoke slowly. "What—what about Schuyler?"

"He's always telling us how we ought to run things." Pilgrim looked down at the ground. "I'm getting tired of that," he said, "and I guess a whole lot of the others are getting tired of it, too."

CHAPTER VII

SCHUYLER READS A NOTE

IT was Monday before Buddy was able to learn how the games had gone. Then he awoke to the fact that Fairview had missed a golden opportunity. For Irontown had lost to Bloomfield and Pompton had beaten Saddle River. Of the other games, Gates had triumphed over Brunswick, and Garrison had dropped her fourth straight, this time to Hasbrouck.

A few minutes past eight o'clock Buddy telephoned to Irontown and got the results. He went directly to school, and sat at his desk, and prepared a new standing of the teams:

W. L. PC.			W. L. PC.		
Irontown	3	1	.750	Bloomfield	2 2 .500
Saddle River...	3	1	.750	Gates	2 2 .500
Lackawanna ...	3	1	.750	Brunswick	1 3 .250
Pompton	3	1	.750	Hasbrouck	1 3 .250
Fairview	2	2	.500	Garrison	0 4 .000

"Gosh!" he said mournfully. "If we had won, we'd be tied with Irontown and Saddle River and Pompton."

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However, he did not waste time repining. A brighter day was coming. Pilgrim had shown him that.

He whistled a bit as he fastened the league standing to the bulletin board. But at noon, when he came out of classes, all thought of whistling died. Tacked to the bulletin board was this:

Did the stuck-up Lizzies chase Carrots O'Toole, too?

Up to this time Carrots's going had caused no comment that he knew of. Now the school was in a mood to criticize anything. Buddy walked home to dinner with his eyes puckered thoughtfully.

He felt that he faced a double problem. First was the question of what he should do if the players asked him about Carrots. Then there was the question of what he should do about Carrots's note.

He did not want to tell the nine why Carrots had quit. At present there were two players who did not like Schuyler—Pilgrim and Neale. There might be still another—Yost. Their dislike, however, was expressed only in an occasional word or look. It did not spread and eat like a decayed spot in an apple.

But, if he told that Schuyler's talk had driven Carrots away, what then? Would not the nine immediately be split? Would not the players imme-

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diately turn on Schuyler and badger him? If that happened, what chance would remain of ever making the pitcher of any use to the nine?

Thinking of Schuyler brought Buddy's mind back to the note that Carrots had written. Schuyler could not be allowed to go on and throw away games. It had to stop. But—and here the captain's eyes grew narrow—what was the best way to stop it?

Of course, he could go to Schuyler and say "Here! You've lost two games. Read that." However, he did not want to handle the situation in this fashion. He did not want to make the first move. He would prefer that Schuyler come to him. If he stuck that note under Schuyler's nose, the pitcher might think it was an attack. On the other hand, if Schuyler came to him with a question, he could use the note as an answer. The fact that he had not shown the note before would rob the whole transaction of its sting.

"Come, Leo," said Mrs. Jones. "You're forgetting your dinner." She never used the familiar nickname of Buddy.

"Thinking, mother," he said ruefully.

He walked to school that afternoon wondering if any questions would be asked him. He had determined that it was best for him to dodge and evade. When he saw Neale approach he braced himself for a cross-examination.

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But the player did not ask the question he expected. Instead:

"Worried about that sign on the bulletin board, Buddy?"

The captain nodded before he had time to think whether it was best to confess that much.

"Forget it," Neale said bluntly. "It won't stir up anything. There's a whole lot of us who think that Carrots quit because of what Yost said."

Buddy stared in surprise. This was news to him. Neale read his look.

"We've thought it a long time, Buddy—and we've kept our mouths shut."

A warm thrill ran through the captain's veins. This was Fairview, the Fairview that Schuyler could not change. Suddenly he resolved to drop all reserve and to take Neale into his confidence. He told about the talk he had had with Pilgrim outside the field house.

"You think the players will follow Pilgrim?" Neale asked.

Buddy nodded.

"At once?"

Buddy's eyes opened wide. "Well, won't they?"

"N-no; I don't think so. You see, that fat-head Schuyler has another plan. He's talking about putting a shower in the field house."

"Oh!" Buddy drew a deep breath. He knew

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what that meant. The brighter day he had dreamed of began to grow dim.

When classes were over, he found Poole and Wally waiting. Poole's first sentence halted him.

"Schuyler's been to see me," said the president of the A. A.

"What about?" Buddy's voice was weak.

"A shower bath. He wants the A. A. to pay for putting one into the field house."

"He wants the A. A. to pay for it," Wally said significantly.

Buddy gave the scorer a quick look. What did that significant tone mean? Suddenly the captain understood. An expression of relief swept across his face.

"See it?" Wally chuckled.

Oh, yes; Buddy saw it. The boys who did not play on the school teams formed an overwhelming majority of the athletic association. They had scant love for the field house. They had been excluded as undesirables. Asking them to pay for a field house improvement was a joke.

"For once," said Wally, "friend Schuyler has missed his step."

Buddy had come from classes listless and dull. Now his spiritless mood was gone. He walked with a springy stride. His eyes were bright. Presto! his troubles were gone.

When he came from the field house in uniform

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there were only a few students watching the work. Schuyler sat with two or three of the boys. Buddy walked that way.

"Ah!" he heard Schuyler say, "look at the teams I'm sent against. Saddle River and Lackawanna. They lead the league, and——"

One of the boys nudged Schuyler and whispered. The pitcher stopped. Buddy walked past and pretended that he had not heard. But his brain was working fast. Carrots's note was in the pocket of the coat he had hung in the field house. Should he go back and get it? Should he use it now?

"O Bud!" Neale called.

The summons decided the captain. He would wait. Turning, he walked toward the infielder.

"Schuyler has dropped his shower bath talk," Neale said in an undertone. "He got wind that the A. A. would turn him down cold."

Buddy smiled. That Schuyler would not continue his agitation and thus keep the pot of unrest boiling was good news.

"Hold on," said Neale. "You're not out of the woods yet."

Buddy's smile became sick. "No?"

"Not on your life. He's saying now that we ought to hunt through our cellars and barns for old lumber and build wooden lockers."

Buddy closed his eyes. Presto! and his troubles were back again. Why couldn't the players be

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satisfied? Why couldn't they see that the big thing was to play ball?

"I was talking to Hill," Neale went on.

Buddy's eyes popped open. Had Hill broken away from Schuyler?

"I was talking to him about his hitting," Neale said. "You know he's weak on a low ball. I had an idea I could show him how to overcome that weakness. He watched me until I got through, and then what do you suppose he asked me? If old weather-boarding would do for building lockers."

"Didn't he ask a single question about the hitting?" Buddy demanded.

"He was thinking about lockers," Neale said bluntly.

All through the afternoon a refrain echoed in Buddy's brain—*Schuyler must be stopped!* The incident of Hill showed that the situation was desperate. Ball players love to hit the ball and see it travel. When a player could pay indifferent attention to a batting lesson, something was very, very wrong. And the wrong was Schuyler.

Though Buddy twisted the problem inside and out, the end of the practice found him far from a solution. Of course, he could go to Schuyler and order him to stop, but that would lead only to hard feelings, and things were bad enough as they were. If there was only some subtle way in which Schuyler could be made to see the harm he was doing!

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In the field house Buddy skinned out of his uniform and began to dress. He was buttoning his collar when a summons came from the doorway:

"Is Jones there?"

"Yes, sir," said Buddy. He had recognized the voice of Mr. Davis, the Latin instructor. He went outside and joined the teacher.

"I can't go to Bloomfield next Wednesday, Jones. You'll have to get somebody to take my place."

"Let them name both umpires," said Buddy.

Mr. Dixon smiled. "Aren't you afraid of getting it rubbed into you?"

"There isn't a team in the league would do that," Buddy laughed. He returned to the field house and made a memorandum to telephone to Bloomfield in the morning so that she would have two umpires ready.

While he stood in front of the mirror combing his hair, he could see the reflection of Schuyler's face. Somebody had stepped on the pitcher's shoes and had spoiled their shiny appearance, and he was staring at them with frowning disapproval.

Buddy ran the comb through his hair. He wondered if Schuyler had any loyalty at all. Suppose he heard somebody else roast Fairview. Would he say a word in its defense?

Buddy had known a boy who owned a dog. He called that dog all the no-account names that ever were, but nobody else dared criticize. Would Schuy-

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ler be like that if the test came? Would he suddenly find that, in spite of all his talk, he really cared for his school? And, if somebody began to say that Fairview was mean, and cheap, and cramped——

Buddy put his comb away. Only one side of his hair was in order, but he had lost interest in the transaction. An idea had come to him. It was an idea fraught with danger, yet he was resolved to put it to the test. If Schuyler would agree to what he would say, he would find himself in a sorry fix. If, on the other hand, Schuyler should disagree—— It was the hope of that that urged him on.

Outside the field house he waited. When Schuyler came forth he fell into step at once.

"I'm going your way," he said.

Schuyler's face showed his surprise. After a moment of quick thought he nodded as though he had made up his mind. He put his hands in his pockets and shut his lips tight. He would wait to see what happened. Plainly the captain had not decided to walk with him for nothing.

"Mr. Davis cannot come to Bloomfield Wednesday," said Buddy.

"No?" Schuyler's voice was non-committal.

"We must dig up another umpire. We need that game. We've won two and lost two, and another defeat will give us a bad set-back. Now——"

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Buddy's pause was cleverly acted.

"Yes," Schuyler prompted.

"You know how close the plays at first base are," Buddy said. "Well——" Another pause. "Look here, Schuyler, I can get a fellow to come out to umpire who'll give us enough close decisions to swing us the game."

Schuyler's jaw dropped as though somebody had punched him in the stomach. "We can't do that," he gasped.

"No; why not?"

"It wouldn't be square."

"Nonsense! This is a dinky little school. We don't cut much ice. What does it matter what we do?"

"But it does matter," Schuyler said earnestly. "Size doesn't mean anything. At Irontown, Drake always said that honesty was honesty, here, there and everywhere."

Buddy winced a bit. So even Schuyler's opinions about fair play came from Irontown! The captain threw this mood off. Schuyler was not saying all he would like to have heard, but nevertheless the pitcher was playing into his hands.

"It doesn't make any difference," he insisted. "Drake is wrong. We're of no account. Didn't you know that? Why, our own fellows don't support us tooth and nail. You must know that. But then, what can you expect? We have no lockers,

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or showers, or gym. It doesn't matter what we do, does it?"

Schuyler halted and looked at the captain for almost a minute. Suddenly he swung around and walked away.

"I don't think," Buddy said softly, "there'll be any more talk about lockers."

There wasn't. Next day when the subject came up in the field house, Schuyler examined a glove with such engrossing attention that he apparently failed to hear the discussion. Buddy wanted to shout. Here was a gun that had been annoying him all season, and now the gun was spiked and apparently spiked for good.

It may have been only his imagination, but he thought that the practice ran better that day. Arthur Stone, due to pitch on the morrow, apparently had all the speed and cunning necessary to win. By the time the work ended, Buddy was in rare good humor.

But, when he reached home and began to study the schedule, some of his good humor left him. From a Fairview standpoint the schedule was distinctly bad. Irontown, Lackawanna and Pompton, all tied for the lead, had games with the three tail-enders, Brunswick, Hasbrouck and Garrison. As for Fairview, her game was with Bloomfield—and Bloomfield had just beaten the mighty Irontown.

About Saddle River the captain no longer

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worried. Pompton had beaten her 15 to 2 in last Saturday's game. When the score had come in, he and the other players had wondered at the slaughter. Now they understood. Five of Saddle River's players had been barred from athletics because of poor work in their studies. Saddle River was out of it.

The other three teams, however, were enough of a problem to keep him awake. If they all won—and it was probable that they would—and if Fairview lost, the gap between them would widen in an alarming manner.

"Oh, well," Buddy sighed, "if Arthur is as good as he was today there'll be nothing to worry about."

But as soon as Arthur began to warm up at Bloomfield, Buddy saw that there was a mighty big difference. The pitcher's speed was only ordinary and his curve broke lazily. Its cracking zip was gone.

When the warm-up was over, he met Arthur and walked toward the bench.

"How's the arm?" he asked guardedly.

"Fine," Arthur smiled. "Feels great."

Buddy dropped down on the bench and arranged his mask and protector so that he could get them as soon as Fairview had to take the field. He had seen cases like this before, times when a pitcher would be feeling fit and yet not have his effective-

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ness. He hoped that Arthur would work into shape as the game ran on.

But it was the fifth inning before the pitcher found his stride. Then it was too late. Bloomfield had amassed five runs, and judging by the game her own pitcher was going, five runs would be enough for her to win.

To Buddy came a feeling that Fate was taunting him and teasing him, always holding out the hope of success, and always snatching away the chance to win. Yet he threw back his shoulders and fought every inch of the way. When Fairview's second run was scored in the sixth inning, he told himself that a couple of more hits would turn the tide. But it was Ahrens who came to bat next, and Ahrens hit into a double play.

Again in the ninth there was a chance to start a rally. This time Ahrens struck out and Fairview's hopes sank to zero. A moment later the game was over.

"Well," said Schuyler, "so friend Arthur can also lose a game now and then."

He had spoken to Yost as the team was leaving the field. The first-baseman bit his lips and gave an angry tug at his sweater.

"Did you notice Ahrens' batting?" he asked.

Schuyler nodded. "Who could help noticing it?"

"If Buddy had a fellow in there who could hit——"

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"Well," Schuyler asked, "why doesn't he put you in there? You can hit."

"He doesn't put me in there because—— You and I are responsible for this lost game, Schuyler."

"Oh, are we?" Schuyler's voice was tart with sarcasm. "And how is that?"

"You filled my head with that paid coach nonsense——"

"It isn't nonsense!" cried Schuyler.

"It is. Look at Brunswick. She has a paid coach. Look where she is—next to last. Anyway, you filled me full of that, and I talked like an idiot. What happened? Buddy dropped me. Then Carrots heard of it——"

"Ah!" said Schuyler; "so that's it, eh?"

"That's it," Yost cried wrathfully. "If I had kept my senses I'd be in there yet and Carrots would be with the team. Instead of that we have no coach and a player who can't hit a balloon. You and I ought to be licked."

"Speak for yourself," Schuyler cried angrily.

"I'm going to," Yost announced. He turned on his heel and walked back to meet Buddy.

The impulse to go to the captain had come on him all of a sudden. And the sight of Buddy walking in the rear and wearily carrying his protector, his mask and his glove, routed any inclination he had to halt and retrace his steps.

"I know why Carrots isn't here," he said hur-

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riedly. "I found it out after that sign went up on the bulletin board. I'm sorry, Buddy. We'd have won that game, maybe, if—— There isn't much use in being sorry. The game is over. But I—I wish I had kept my mouth shut."

One by one the weary lines in the captain's face disappeared. His back straightened.

"Yost," he said, "tomorrow you go back to the bag."

A hot flush ran into Yost's cheeks. "I didn't come here hoping you'd put me back."

"That's why you're going back," Buddy said softly.

He entered the Bloomfield dressing-room ready now to harken his players as a captain should. Wasn't it strange, he thought, that every time old Mr. Hardluck made him groggy, something good happened to revive his drooping spirits. Now, if Carrots would come back——

"You can't tell," he whispered to himself. "Maybe Carrots will."

The game had been slow and long drawn out. Before the players were ready for the street, the Bloomfield captain hurried in on them with a slip of paper in his hand. He had telephoned to Iron-town and had the results of all the other games.

Buddy nerved himself for the worst. It came. The three leaders had won. Poor old Saddle River had been beaten again, this time by Gates.

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On the ride home the captain made a new tabulation showing the standing of the teams:

	W.	L.	PC.		W.	L.	PC.
Irontown	4	1	.800	Bloomfield	3	2	.600
Lackawanna ...	4	1	.800	Fairview	2	3	.400
Pompton	4	1	.800	Brunswick	1	4	.200
Gates	3	2	.600	Hasbrouck	1	4	.200
Saddle River...	3	2	.600	Garrison	0	5	.000

Hill, the third-baseman, whistled. "We're in seventh place now."

There wasn't much talk. Schuyler ran his eyes over the league standing and then looked away. He was more concerned with what Yost might have told the captain.

When the stage came to Fairview he plucked at the first-baseman's arm and halted him.

"What did you tell Jones about me?"

"Nothing."

"You told him something."

"I told him I was sorry for the part I had played."

"Oh!" Schuyler's tone became a slur. "I suppose he's putting you back on the bag?"

"He is."

Schuyler's lips curled.

Yost's mouth became a thin line. His fists clenched. "Well," he asked; "what about it?"

"Oh—ah—nothing." In some things Schuyler knew when it was time to quit.

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He walked home not in the least disturbed by the afternoon's events. Yost had given him his first intimation that gossip had forced Carrots to quit. For all of that, he felt no twinges of conscience. He was sure that the school was well rid of the red-haired huckster boy. Carrots a coach? Wake up!

Next day Yost went back to first base and Neale returned to second. What few students were at the practice lifted a cheer. Ahrens smiled ruefully. He was disappointed that he had not made good—but not sore. He understood his own limitations.

Schuyler watched the change with a smile of derision. When it came time for him to warm-up, he hurled the ball as though he was trying to work off a grouch. Buddy sent him to pitch to the batters. When Yost came to the plate he put everything he had on the ball, and Yost struck out. The first-baseman smiled quietly. He thought he knew why Schuyler was trying so hard against him.

"Stay there until you hit it," said Buddy.

Yost nodded. Schuyler drew back his arm. Instantly the first-baseman stepped forward as far as the batter's box would allow. He hit at Schuyler's fadeaway before it had a chance to break, and the ball sailed away toward the outfield.

Schuyler was furious, but dared not show it. His anger robbed him of some of his effectiveness, and

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Neale, McCarter and Hill all rapped his offerings.

Buddy's face crinkled into a wide, happy smile. The players, evidently, had found their batting eyes. Yost's return had improved the fielding twenty per cent. Two or three victories in a row might change the league standing considerably.

The next game was against Gates at home. This time, Buddy thought, the schedule treated Fairview kindlier. True, Irontown was to cross bats with Brunswick who had only won one game out of five, but Lackawanna and Pompton would be playing against each other and cutting each other's throats. On that there was comfort. At least one of the three leading teams was bound to lose.

How the students would act was a problem that Buddy refused to face. Judged by the spirit that Pilgrim and Yost had shown of late, the nine would fight if not a boy turned out. For all of that, the captain longed for an old-time game—Fairview cheers and Fairview songs—something to warm the blood. However, if it didn't come the nine would have to do without it. He wasn't going to waste time worrying about whether it came or not.

Another problem was Schuyler, and it was a problem that could not be thrust aside. If he weakened in the closing moments—— Buddy hunted up Arthur Stone.

"Will you get to the Gates game?"

Arthur nodded. "Nothing to stop me this time."

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Buddy drew a deep breath. Now let Schuyler weaken if that was what Fate had in store for him!

Almost the entire student body turned out for the game. Instead of cheering and singing, they stood about in silence. Some few of the boys wanted to make a noise, and by degrees they herded together. Theirs was the only Fairview cheering heard.

Buddy watched his players. So far as he could see, they took no notice of the coolness. He shut his lips grimly and signaled Schuyler to pitch to the first Gates batter. Schuyler pitched, and the batter fouled out.

A thin, weak, bloodless cheer from Fairview.

Even when Yost's crashing hit scored two runs in the third, the cheers did not grow in volume. When two more runs came over in the fifth, there was a bit more vigor to the noise but not much. And when Gates scored once on Schuyler in the seventh, there was a laugh and a solitary cry of "Good boy, Gates." But the student who had shouted that had carried the quarrel a little too far. Other students began to absent-mindedly walk all over him, and at last he slunk away. Not cheering Fairview was one thing—cheering Gates was another.

That seventh inning set Buddy's nerves on edge. Was Schuyler going again? But Schuyler got safely through the seventh and eighth. Then came the ninth. He walked out to the mound smiling

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like the cat that had just swallowed the canary. At last he was going to win. He had a three run lead at his back.

The first batter fouled a dozen balls, and then got his base. The next boy hit a single to right field, and the first runner went to third. Then, on the next ball pitched, a Gates batter shot a two-bagger down the third-base line. One run was in, runners were on second and third, and no one was out.

All afternoon, obeying whispered instructions from Buddy, Arthur had been throwing a ball around between innings. Now, when he caught Buddy's signal, his arm was not entirely cold. He walked out to the diamond.

"Hello!" said Schuyler haughtily. "What are you doing here?"

"Going to pitch," Arthur answered.

"Who says so?"

"Buddy."

Up to this point Schuyler had not glanced at his catcher. He had been watching the base runners while waiting for the next Gates batter to step up. He looked quickly toward the plate. Buddy's glove moved. He handed the ball to Arthur and strode toward the bench.

There had been a tightening tension among the fielders. All at once it broke. Their voices called jovially to the new pitcher.

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Arthur shot the ball toward the plate.

"Strike one!" ruled Mr. Davis.

Schuyler pulled on his sweater and dropped down on the bench. Inwardly he was raging. Yanked from the box with only two runs scored on him all afternoon. Yanked from the box to give friend Arthur a chance!

He was sick of it. As soon as the game was over he'd make Buddy explain. He wasn't going to be anybody's fool.

"Strike three! Batter's out!" came Mr. Davis' voice.

Schuyler choked. That fellow was the weakest batter on the team. Anybody could strike him out.

There was the sharp crack of a hit ball. Schuyler's eyes followed the sphere's flight. Out it went, then down and into the waiting hands of Pilgrim.

The runner on third elected to try to score. A wild throw, he thought, might let two runs in and tie the score. He dashed for the plate.

Pilgrim's throw reached Buddy on the second bound. The captain stabbed at a leg that flashed at him out of a cloud of dust.

"Out!" said Mr. Davis. The Gates runner sighed. The game was over.

Schuyler jumped up, took two quick steps toward Buddy, paused. Maybe it would be just as well if he demanded an explanation when he and the captain were alone. Perhaps it might be best if

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the players and the students did not hear what Buddy said.

For there was a chance, Schuyler knew, that Buddy might refer to his other games. To an outsider that would sound bad. So far as he was concerned, he would refuse to accept such an explanation. He would demand to know what was what—why Arthur was pitched against the weak teams, and why he was sent in against the leaders, and why he was yanked for Arthur to make a dramatic entrance.

That final play of the game had broken down some of the student indifference. Belated cheers were now sounding from the field. Schuyler did not hear them.

While he dressed a heavy frown darkened his face. He hoped that Buddy would not be long.

The captain had no intention of delaying. He knew by the signs that Schuyler was ready to explode. Well, the sooner it came, the sooner it would be over.

Tonight he did not bother to comb his hair. He slapped his cap on his head, called a quick "So long, fellows!" and strode out. Schuyler followed.

Outdoors the pitcher came alongside the captain at once.

"What's the meaning of this?" he demanded.

"The meaning of what?" Buddy asked calmly.

"Of taking me out of the box when we're two

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runs ahead. I was all right. It was my game. In another minute I'd have struck out that fellow that Arthur fanned."

"Would you?" Buddy asked.

Schuyler's anger flared. "You know I would," he cried. "You and Arthur are friends——"

"Just a minute," said Buddy. "You pitched against Saddle River and blew up in the seventh and eighth."

"You can't put anything like that over on me. I'm talking about today."

"And against Lackawanna you blew up in the eighth and ninth," Buddy went on. "Did you ever stop to think that there might be a reason for the way you go to pieces?"

A stab of cold apprehension chilled the fire in Schuyler's veins. Reason? Was there a reason?

"I have a note here." Buddy put his hand in his pocket and drew out a piece of paper. "Suppose you read it, Schuyler."

Wondering, and fearing, the pitcher opened the note:

Schuyler wouldn't use my body swing, so just watch and see if I'm right. His arm will tire. Along about the seventh or eighth inning he'll get his. See if I'm right.

"Carrots sent me that," said Buddy.

Schuyler looked up from the note with a scowl of disbelief. "When, after I had pitched a couple

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of games? To make that advice about a body swing look good?"

"Carrots gave me that note before the stage left for Saddle River. He told me not to open it until after the game."

Emotions chased one another across Schuyler's face. First amusement that anybody should think he would believe such a yarn, then doubt, then a dawning realization that Buddy spoke the truth. He stared down at the note and read it again. Come to think of it, his arm always did get tired toward the end. But he had thought that every pitcher felt that fatigue.

"Better put it away and study it," said Buddy.

Slowly—very slowly—Schuyler folded the note and put it in his pocket.

CHAPTER VIII

SCHUYLER ANSWERS A QUESTION

ALL that was honest and clean in Schuyler's nature came to the surface that night. A dozen times he read Carrots's note, and each time its logic seemed clearer. His arm had failed because it alone had had to stand the strain—that is, unless every pitcher grew weary after seven or eight innings.

Did they? That was the last lingering doubt. Schuyler went forth in search of Arthur Stone.

"Tell me something," he said impulsively. "How do you feel at the end of a game?"

"All right," Arthur answered. He did not understand. His eyes said so.

"I mean," Schuyler amended, "is your arm so tired out that it hurts?"

"No." Arthur shook his head. "Of course, I'm not as fresh as at the start, but——"

"But it doesn't feel as though it's all in?"

"No. What's the matter, Schuyler? Arm bothering you?"

Schuyler said his arm was all right. As he walked back toward home his mind debated what

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he should do. Change to the body swing? A look of distress crossed his face. He had tried it once and his pitching had been a failure. What good would it do him to adopt a motion that would make him easy to hit?

On the other hand, what good would it do him to pitch as he pitched now—breezing along nicely for six innings, and then blowing up with a bang?

"I guess," he said thoughtfully, "it's the body swing for mine. Maybe, if I get it, my curve will be all right."

When he came to the house he did not go inside. Carrots's note was in his pocket, and his fingers felt it. He had jeered at this huckster boy. Yet this same huckster boy had looked at him once and had recognized his weak spot.

Schuyler leaned against the gate post and swallowed as though his throat was painful. His theory about paid coaches had been knocked into a hat. Suppose this chap Carrots was a good coach? Suppose his talk had sent Carrots adrift? Suppose this red-haired boy could help the school?

"But," Schuyler argued weakly, "it may have been an accident the way he noticed my pitching."

His sense of right and wrong would not be stilled. He was responsible for Carrots going. It wasn't up to him to decide the question of acci-

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dents. It was up to him to keep his hand clean, to do what was right, to play his part like a man.

He strode away from the gate post. Five minutes later he entered the field house.

Yost and Neale were at the table. They looked up and nodded shortly. McCarter, the shortstop, called a greeting.

"Hello, Schuyler! We've been figuring where we stand."

"Got the results of the games?" Schuyler asked.

McCarter nodded. "Buddy was in a little while ago and told us. Saddle River came to life and beat Garrison, Lackawanna beat Pompton, Hasbrouck beat Bloomfield and Irontown beat Brunswick. There's the league standing on the table."

Schuyler approached to look at it. In silence Yost and Neale made room. The pitcher studied the standing:

	W.	L.	PC.		W.	L.	PC.
Irontown	5	1	.833	Gates	3	3	.500
Lackawanna	5	1	.833	Bloomfield	3	3	.500
Saddle River	4	2	.666	Hasbrouck	2	4	.333
Pompton	4	2	.666	Brunswick	1	5	.166
Fairview	3	3	.500	Garrison	0	6	.000

The pitcher scarcely heard the talk that went on around him. If he hadn't weakened in his games against Saddle River and Lackawanna—— He

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caught Yost's glance and nodded toward the door. The first-baseman hesitated. Then, still in a hesitating manner, he arose from his chair. Schuyler walked out of the field house. Yost followed.

"Well?" he asked.

Schuyler's voice was low. "Do you know where Carrots O'Toole lives?"

"Yes."

"Will you show me the house?"

"Come on," said Yost. He had made a quick decision. Even as he led the way he wondered if he had not been too hasty and if he should not have inquired what this strange request meant.

In silence the two boys walked through the quiet roads of the little town. Presently Yost came to a halt.

"There it is," he said. "That one with the light burning in the parlor."

"Thank you," said Schuyler. He took a step toward the house.

Yost had thought that Schuyler wanted merely to locate the geography of the place. When he saw the pitcher stride forward, he clutched and caught his arm.

"Here," he said grimly. "You and I have made enough trouble. What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to ask him something," Schuyler answered.

"What?"

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"I'm going to ask him to come back and coach the team."

"You're not fooling me?"

"I'm not a liar," Schuyler said with dignity.

The first-baseman dropped his hand. When he spoke again all the grimness was gone from his voice.

"Schuyler," he said, "I guess you're all right at that."

"I'm not asking for compliments," Schuyler answered stiffly, and walked toward the house.

He found a bell knob alongside the door. When he pulled, a bell jangled somewhere in the dwelling. He heard the sound of a chair being moved and following that the echo of footsteps. Then the door was opened.

"Hello!" said Carrots. "How's the fellow from Irontown? Come in."

An open book on the parlor table told that Carrots had been reading. Schuyler sat on the edge of a chair and ran nervous fingers over the top of his cap.

"So you woke up to the fact that the body swing might be best for you," Carrots stated calmly.

Schuyler's back stiffened.

"I've been following your record," Carrots went on calmly. "Two defeats and yanked out of the box the third time."

Schuyler was finding the interview decidedly

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unpleasant. He resolved to finish it as quickly as possible.

"I came," he said hurriedly, "to see if you would go back to the team." There! It was out!

Carrots gave a little surprised grunt and stared intently at his visitor. "What's the game?" he asked at last.

"Buddy and some of the fellows think you could help them."

"But what brings you here?"

"I—I heard a few days ago that you quit because—because——"

"All right. We'll pass that. What else?"

"Buddy showed me your note."

"When?"

"Today."

"Then you decided you had been all wrong——"

"No," said Schuyler; "I thought maybe you might be right."

"You're one of those stick-to-a-finish fellows, aren't you?" Carrots asked calmly. He got up and began to walk around the table, around, around, around, until Schuyler was sure that he must have walked a mile.

"I see your game now," Carrots said at last. "You think I might have the right dope on why you blew up, and you think I might have the right dope on other things. Just the same you won't be surprised if I merely made a good guess in your case."

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Schuyler gave a start.

Carrots grinned. "You came here saying to yourself that, as long as you are up in the air about me, it's up to you to do the square thing and try to get me back. If I do help the nine you can pat your chest and say if it wasn't for you I wouldn't have been there. And if I fall down, you can say that you did your part, anyway."

Schuyler squirmed in his seat. "I came here because it seemed the fair thing."

"Sure," said Carrots; "and why wasn't it the fair thing for you to keep your mouth shut at the start? Believe me, if I was captain and you started to beef about my way of doing things, I'd take you out in a vacant lot and I'd wallop you good."

Schuyler stood up. "It's up to you to come or stay away," he said. "I've done my part."

Carrots's eyes became thoughtful. "What are you going to do about that body swing?"

"I'm going to try it out."

"An honest try or just sc-so?"

"I've got to give it an honest try. I've got to find out what's wrong with me."

"In other words, you're going to take my advice as an experiment—a sort of I'll-try-anything-once, eh?"

Schuyler found his visit growing more uncomfortable every minute.

"Isn't that right?" Carrots demanded.

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"I—I guess it is," the pitcher answered.

Carrots nodded once or twice and led the way out to the hall. With his hand on the doorknob he paused:

"If I come out and tell you to do something you think isn't right——"

"I'll do it," said Schuyler. "If you spill the beans it's up to you and Buddy."

"Gee!" said Carrots. "Why didn't you get some of that sense into your noodle a couple of weeks ago?"

The huckster boy swung open the door and Schuyler passed out. Not until Yost asked him eagerly what Carrots had said did he awake to the fact that Carrots had promised nothing. For all he knew, his visit may have been in vain. He drew a deep breath. Well, he had cleaned the slate. Whatever happened now wasn't up to him.

He had a mind to go to Buddy and tell what he had done. On second thought he rejected the idea. Going to Buddy would look as though he was trying to crawl.

But the captain was not kept long in ignorance of what had happened. After breakfast next morning, as he sat on the porch in the warm sunshine, Carrots came down the street.

"Hello, Bud!"

"Hello!" Buddy drew up another chair.

The huckster boy stared out at the road and

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smiled quietly. "Schuyler came to see me last night."

Buddy found a sudden tightness in his throat. What was this, more trouble? Had the note, instead of chastening Schuyler's spirit, made him more bumptious than before?

"What about?" Buddy asked.

"He wanted me to come back as coach."

"What?"

"Fact." Carrots grinned. "I'll come now that he's stopped making cracks."

A thrill ran through every nerve of the captain's body. A moment before the summer air had been soft and sweet. Now it was like rarest nectar.

"Gee!" he cried happily, "but this is good news. I'm glad he woke up that you knew——"

Carrots made a wry face. "He isn't sure whether I know anything about baseball or not."

"He isn't? Not after asking you to come back?"

"The note has him guessing. He isn't sure whether I'm a wise bird or just a good bluffer. He's willing to take a chance."

Buddy's face fell. If that was Schuyler's spirit the nine wasn't much better off than before.

"If he feels that way, Carrots, he'll make trouble all over again."

"Oh, no. He said he'd do as he was told."

This time Buddy almost jumped from the chair. "Schuyler said that?"

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"He did. I asked him what would happen if he got an order he didn't like. He said he'd toe the mark."

All at once the sunshine became brighter, the grass was greener, the blue of the sky was fairer. Why, this was fine! This was all right!

Buddy ran indoors and brought down the schedule. He and Carrots studied it for an hour. The huckster boy pointed out that Irontown's showing of five games won and one game lost was not as impressive as it seemed.

"Why?" Buddy demanded.

"Because," said Carrots, "five of her games have been against the five weakest teams in the league."

At that Buddy broke into a joyous whistle. He thought that things were surely "breaking" for him.

During the afternoon he met Schuyler. He tried to say that the visit to Carrots had been pretty white, but the pitcher cut him short.

"Carrots is back," Schuyler said. "There's been a lot of talk about what you could have done with him. Now it's up to you to win your games."

"It's up to all of us," Buddy said. He was a bit disappointed. He had planned to be very friendly, and he had thought that Schuyler would meet him half way.

Not until practice time next day did he tell that Carrots was coming back. Then he tried to make the announcement a matter-of-fact affair. The play-

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ers received the news with cheers, but not a sound came from Schuyler. Buddy's face clouded. Had Schuyler gone to the coach merely because he thought it was the right thing to do, and was he going to be, in everything else, the same old thorn in the flesh of the nine?

Quite a bit of student resentment seemed to have died during the Gates game. Today there was a large turnout. Carrots's appearance was the signal for an outburst of noise. The huckster boy grinned and looked somewhat embarrassed.

At once he took charge of the pitching. He showed Schuyler how to use the body swing, and Schuyler began. He tried to pitch his fadeaway.

"Here!" cried Carrots. "Cut it. No curves. Time for that when you get the motion."

So all during the work Schuyler threw nothing but straight balls and tried for form. Not once did he speak. He was as stiff and silent as though he was practicing with strangers.

When the pitching ended and Carrots took charge of the fielding, he drew on a sweater and retreated to one side. There he remained, a lonely figure.

Ordinarily, he was quite a talker in the field house. Whenever a debate arose over a play his was the loudest voice. Today, though, he had nothing to say. He dressed and got out, and some of the players looked after him and shook their heads and wondered what was wrong with him.

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Next day he continued to go through the motions Carrots had taught him, again, and again, and again. When the work was over and he dressed a student came to the field house door. After a hesitating moment the boy stepped over the threshold.

A dozen eyes swung around to watch Schuyler. The pitcher made no protest. The student said he had an offer from the *Weekly Sentinel*, published at Irontown, to write half a column about the nine.

"You'll give me the right dope, won't you, Buddy?" he asked.

The captain said he would.

The boy withdrew. Pilgrim walked to the door. The sign barring students was still there.

"I guess this is about over, isn't it?" he asked. He laid one hand on the paper.

Here and there heads nodded. Schuyler said nothing. Pilgrim tore down the sign.

By morning the news had run through the school. Buddy, catching a sudden inspiration, posted a notice calling a special meeting of the athletic association for 12:45 o'clock, fifteen minutes before afternoon classes. The nine was scheduled to play Hasbrouck that day and there would be no time for a meeting after school. What he had to say had to be said before the game.

Almost every student was in the assembly room

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when, at the appointed hour, he arose to speak.

"Fellows," he said, "we all make mistakes. The nine has made them. I have made them. You have made them. Let's forget all that and start afresh.

"One-third of the schedule has been played and we're only two games behind first place. Irontown has won five out of six, and five of her games have been against tail-enders. She won't do as well as that in her next six games. But we'll do better in our next six games than we have done in the first six. We're going to gain."

Cheers from the students.

"Carrots is with us again," Buddy went on. "You know what that means. But Carrots can't do it all, and the nine can't do it all. You fellows must help. You must get behind the nine. You must support it. You must cheer it on from the first pitched ball to the last out. Will you?"

A chorus of shouts arose from the floor. Boys jumped up and waved their hands and yelled that Fairview wanted the pennant. Poole banged for order, but it was no use. The germ of enthusiasm had caught the meeting. They would probably have cheered all afternoon had not the class bell sounded and sent them to their rooms.

Schuyler went to his class with a scowl on his face. He thought that belittling Irontown's victories was mighty cheap. Regardless of whom she

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had played, Irontown had won five games. This talk of Fairview's winning a pennant was all right. He'd like nothing better than to win a string of games that would give Fairview a pennant. But how in the name of common sense could Fairview do it?

The students came to the game that afternoon, not in ones or twos, but in cheering column fours. While they sang Fairview's school hymn, Buddy spoke to the players in the field house.

"Fellows," he said, "we ought to beat Hasbrouck. If we do, we're going up. Irontown plays Saddle River, and no matter which team wins, it helps us. Brunswick plays Lackawanna. She's lost five straight. She's about due. Garrison plays Pompton. She's lost six straight and she's over-due. Win this game today, and tonight I'll show you a big change in the standing of the clubs."

"We'll win it," yelled Neale. "Clear the way, there, and let's get at them."

Fairview charged out on the field brimming over with pepper and ginger. And when the game started she tore into Hasbrouck in the same way. Before the third inning was over she had scored seven runs, and after that the contest was never in doubt. For Arthur Stone, calm and smiling, was pitching the brand of ball that had already beaten Brunswick and Garrison.

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Carrots sat beside Buddy on the bench. When the game was over, he spoke just one sentence.

"Keep on playing the way you played today," he said, "and Irontown or any other school won't stop you."

Schuyler smiled. He was glad that the nine had won; but beating Hasbrouck was not beating Irontown—not so that you could notice it.

In the field house, after the game, there was scarcely room enough to dress. But for all that it was a jovial crowd. Students crowded the players, and players pushed students out of the way when the pressure became too great.

By degrees, though, the students calmed down and departed. At last only players were in the place.

The Hasbrouck boys packed their grips and prepared to go home. The Hasbrouck captain shook hands with Buddy.

"We've played Irontown and Lackawanna and Pompton," he said distinctly. "You have a team here that's as good as any."

Schuyler gave him a quick, startled look. The other players broke out with excited talk. The Hasbrouck boys departed. Buddy stood in the doorway and looked after them, a great new hope in his eyes.

"How about finding out how the other games went?" said Neale.

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Buddy swung around from the doorway and said that he was ready.

A new candy and ice-cream shop had been opened on Main Street and it had a pay-station telephone. Down to this store the nine went.

"Say," said Neale, "why couldn't we give Iron-town the number of that 'phone and tell them that any time they wanted information about our games that would be the place to call."

"Maybe the storekeeper wouldn't want to bother," said Pilgrim.

"Shucks!" scoffed Neale. "He's after business, isn't he?"

The second-baseman proved to be right. The storekeeper would be only too glad to answer questions if somebody would bring him the score as soon as the game was over.

"There!" Neale cried triumphantly. "That much is settled. Now, Buddy, get Irontown."

Buddy called a number. A minute later, when he began to speak, the players became quiet. First he gave Irontown the number of the telephone and told them of the arrangement the nine had made. Next he asked for that day's results.

Neale took a paper from his pocket and laid it on an ice-cream table.

"Call it to me, Buddy, as you get it," he said. The captain nodded. An instant later he spoke: "Garrison beat Pompton."

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"Gee whiz!" breathed a delighted voice.

Neale's pencil made a note.

"Bloomfield beat Gates."

Silence among the players. They weren't interested in that game.

"Brunswick beat Lackawanna."

This time there was almost a yell. Neale frowned and shook his head for quiet.

"And Irontown beat Saddle River," Buddy finished. "Thank you." He hung up the receiver.

Instantly a clamor broke out. If Lackawanna and Pompton had lost Fairview ought to go up, and with Saddle River defeated, too—— Say, what changes did that make?

"Just a minute, fellows," Buddy pleaded. "Wait until we figure it."

Soon the new standing of the league was ready:

	W.	L.	PC.		W.	L.	PC.
Irontown	6	1	.857	Pompton	4	3	.571
Lackawanna ...	5	2	.714	Gates	3	4	.428
Fairview	4	3	.571	Hasbrouck	2	5	.285
Saddle River...	4	3	.571	Brunswick	2	5	.265
Bloomfield	4	3	.571	Garrison	1	6	.142

Fairview in third place! The clamor became wild.

Schuyler walked out of the shop. He was not excited. Of course, Fairview had won a tidy victory that day, but—there it was—but Irontown had

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won, too. How was Fairview ever going to make much headway if Irontown kept on winning game after game?

Next day Schuyler came out resigned to his fate of pitching straight balls with a body swing behind them. When Carrots came over to watch him he thought nothing of that for Carrots watched him every practice day. But this time, after a few minutes, the coach gave a chuckle.

"You've got it, old man," he said.

Schuyler glanced back at him. "The body swing?"

"Sure; it doesn't seem so stiff and awkward now, does it?"

Schuyler pitched another straight ball and experimented. No; the motion came a whole lot easier.

"Suppose you try your curve," said Carrots.

The pitcher felt like a boy who has been released from prison. He wound up and threw. It was his celebrated fadeaway, but it faded so little that it could not be said to have faded at all. His face lengthened.

"Easy, there," said Carrots. "Can the gloomy stuff. You'll have to get used to handling your curves just as you got used to handling the straight ball. Keep at it."

Schuyler kept at it until Buddy said enough. He was sent to the box and told to try straight balls

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on the batters. While he worked he reflected gloomily that he would certainly not get his curves working well enough to pitch next Saturday against Pompton. And the game after that was against Irontown. Surely they wouldn't trust him with *that*. It began to seem to him as though he was fated for a long spell of idleness. Perhaps it would have been just as well had he stuck to his arm motion. At least he would then have pitched in his turn.

In the field house, when the work was over, Buddy took him aside and told him that Arthur would hurl the next. He gave a short nod and said nothing. Buddy looked at him anxiously.

"We don't want to use you, Schuyler, until you have your body swing down pat."

"Oh, that's all right," said Schuyler.

But Buddy knew that it wasn't all right. "Carrots," he amended, "says that you ought to be ready in about four or five more days."

Schuyler gave a wise smile. He was quite sure that Carrots had said nothing of the kind. The way his curves had behaved that day it would take him a year, he thought, to amount to anything. He wondered if all this was a game to put him on the shelf. He didn't want to think it, but he could not push the thought away.

He went back to his hooks and dressed with the same silence that had characterized him since his

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trip to Carrots's house. Buddy, watching, shook his head and sighed.

That night he hunted up Carrots. The coach puckered his eyes.

"You can't tell about these fiery chaps," he said. "He may think we're trying to slip something over on him or he may just have a grouch. Wait until we see which it is."

"But if he throws us down, Carrots——"

"Shucks!" said the huckster boy. "I guess Arthur Stone can pitch a few extra licks if he has to."

But Buddy knew that Arthur could not pitch two games a week. And he knew that Carrots knew it, too.

Next day he watched Schuyler all through the practice. He did not know where he was. On the one hand, Schuyler pitched heart and soul, trying, trying, trying to get his curves to break right. That was a good sign. On the other hand, the pitcher spoke to nobody, went his way alone, seemed to have forgotten that he had any friends among the players. That was bad, very bad.

In truth, Schuyler was altogether out of sorts. He was impatient to see the ball breaking with its old sharp bend, and when it didn't he became discouraged.

Then, too, he could not find it in his heart to take part in all this wild talk about Fairview's

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chances. He wanted to believe it. He honestly wanted to—now. But he couldn't.

Saturday the nine went to Pompton. Carrots went along and so did Schuyler. He had thought that he would be left at home, but he had been told to make the trip.

During the ride over there was much excited talk. The schedule of games for that day distinctly favored Fairview. Lackawanna and Iron-town, the leaders, were pitted against each other. No matter which team won, Fairview would gain if she won. And there was great hope that she would win because Pompton was showing signs of weakening. Lackawanna had beaten her a week ago, and Wednesday she had been beaten by Garrison, the tail-end.

Nor was this all. Saddle River and Bloomfield, tied with Fairview, were playing against each other. In other words, the six leading teams were all clawing each other, and the three nines that won would surely climb in the league standing. It was such a chance as might never come again.

Almost every one of the players hoped that Iron-town would be beaten. Her record of only one game lost out of eight played was beginning to look ominous. She had to be pulled back.

Schuyler turned his head away and smiled. But he did not turn it far enough, and Buddy saw the corners of his mouth. The captain's hands clenched.

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Great Scott, was Schuyler still daffy about his old school? Did he still carry a divided allegiance? Buddy had thought that that was all over. Was this the reason that Schuyler held aloof?

"Try to get the jump on Pompton," Carrots advised him. "She's lost twice, and if the third team starts to pound her, she may lose her nerve."

Buddy nodded in a preoccupied way. His thoughts were on Schuyler, not on the game.

But the moment the stage reached Pompton his mind came back to the business in hand. He hustled the players to the Pompton dressing-room, hustled them to the field, and then got the practice running with plenty of zest. After that he warmed up Arthur and Schuyler. From the ways the players had fielded and from the way Arthur's delivery behaved, he was sure that he would have no excuses to offer if Fairview was beaten.

As the visiting nine, Fairview went first to bat. Pilgrim went out on a sharp rap to the short-stop, Hill was called out on strikes, and McCarter scratched a fluke hit to the third-baseman. With Neale at bat, McCarter got the signal to go down. His slide, as he neared second base, was nicely executed, but the ball got there ahead of him and the umpire ruled him out. Pompton was playing good ball.

"Hold them, now," Carrots urged.

Arthur's first ball was spanked to right field for a

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single. The next batter walked. Things looked bad for the Blue and White.

And then came a play that left Pompton gasping. The batter met the ball squarely, and the runners tore away. Buddy gave a frightened gulp.

Yost—big, lanky Yost—saw a streak of white. Instinctively he leaped into the air, and his height and reach were put to good use. The ball struck his glove and stayed there.

"Come back!" screamed the Pompton coaches.

Yost scrambled to first base and touched the bag. The boy who had started so joyously for second was out.

"Here!" yelled Neale. "*Here!*"

Yost whipped the ball to second for the completion of a glorious triple play.

The Pompton team was dazed. Laughing and capering the Fairview boys ran to their bench.

"Now's the time," cried Carrots. "You have them up in the air. Go after the first good ball that comes up. Soak it to them while they're off their feet. You, Neale; murder the first ball that comes over."

Neale strolled to the plate and waited. He was Fairview's star hitter. The bench watched him breathlessly. He let the first pitch go by, but the second was to his liking. His big black bat swung out, and the ball hit the turf out in left center. It was a two-base blow.

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"Now, Yost!" Carrots had taken command. "No bunting. This isn't the time to play for one run. Go after him."

Yost hit a grounder right at the shortstop. Neale started for third, swung around in his tracks and made back for second.

"Come on, Neale," yelled Pilgrim, coaching at third.

The rattled shortstop had allowed the ball to go through his legs. Neale romped home, and Yost pulled up at second.

"Now a bunt," cried Carrots. "They're gone. Now a bunt to tie them in knots. You, Carlson; a bunt."

Carlson's bunt went straight at the pitcher. The boy's nerves, however, were all on edge. He picked up the ball, dropped it, picked it up again, dropped it and then booted it toward third base.

Carrots sat back. "Hit any old thing," he said. "They're through."

Pompton's nerve was broken. While the pitcher held the ball, Carlson sneaked down to second. On Linquist's hit he and Yost came home. Three runs in and none out.

Two more runs were scored before the agony was over. The second inning started with Arthur Stone taking things very easy.

Two hours later the game was over. Pompton had never been dangerous.

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"Wow!" cried Neale. "Now let's see what happened around the rest of the league."

They called Irontown before taking the stage, but Irontown did not yet have the results. They told how their own game had gone and then started their journey homeward.

Arriving at Fairview, they found a crowd of students waiting.

"How did the game go, Buddy?" arose a cry.

Buddy stood up in the stage. "We won, fellows."

"Yah! Irontown next! We'll show them."

Schuyler smiled again.

As though by a common consent the nine walked to the candy shop and poured in through the doorway. The students followed.

"Oh, hold on," cried Neale. "Have a heart! The whole school can't come in just to hear a fellow telephone."

The students took no offense. Jostling and scurrying they thronged out to the sidewalk. The players were left alone.

"Believe me," said Pilgrim, "if Lackawanna has beaten Irontown my supper will taste better."

"It must have been some fight," came from Carlson. "If Lackawanna won she's tied for first place."

The talk ran from player to player. Was Irontown really as strong as her string of victories

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seemed to prove? Somebody appealed to Schuyler, but the pitcher evaded the question. Buddy's hands clenched again.

The captain gave central the number he wanted. Once more Neale spread paper on an ice-cream table and waited.

"Hello!" said Buddy. "This is Fairview. I'm ready. Go ahead. Saddle River beat Bloomfield. Yes; I got that. Garrison won from Brunswick. Go on. Hasbrouck defeated Gates. Irontown won from Lackawanna."

"Good night!" said a voice. "Are they ever going to lose?"

Buddy heard the question. He did not want his players to fall into that mood. He had an idea that, if he looked around quickly, he would see Schuyler with that wise, I-knew-it sort of smile.

"Can you give me the score?" Buddy asked. "All right; let's have it. Lackawanna, two; Irontown—— What's that? *What? Irontown twenty-one?*"

"Holy Mackerel!" breathed a voice. "*Twenty-one!*"

Buddy put down the receiver. If Irontown could do that to her strongest rival—— He pushed the thought aside. He had to swing the minds of his players before they could begin to wonder what Irontown might do to them. For their game with Irontown came next.

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He turned briskly from the telephone. There was Schuyler nodding his head as though he was not at all surprised.

"Good night!" said the pitcher. "Seven won and one lost. That about gives her the pennant."

Buddy's head grew hot. Was this the way for a Fairview player to act in the crisis? He saw a thoughtful look come into the eyes of Hill and Linquist and McCarter. And then, almost imperceptibly, he saw McCarter's head nod, too.

At that, for the moment, he lost all command of himself. Without waiting to think, without weighing his words, he pushed past Neale and confronted the pitcher.

"Schuyler," he demanded, "who are you rooting for, Fairview or Irontown?"

Instantly a startled, breathless silence settled over the room. Schuyler's face went white.

Carrots frowned and shook his head. This was bad. He tried to save the situation.

"Oh," he said, trying to speak lightly, "I guess Schuyler doesn't mean——"

"I'll do my own talking," said the pitcher. His voice shook a little. "I'm a Fairview fellow. I'm a Fairview rooter. I want Fairview to win. But——" He drew back a step and faced them. "But I'm no fool!"

"Right over the plate," Carrots murmured softly. Schuyler turned on his heel and walked toward

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the door. At the candy counter he paused and bought a bar of chocolate. He appeared to be calm and quite the master of himself, but his blood was boiling. He waited for his change, put it in his pocket, and went out.

Back in the store nobody spoke. A minute passed. Then, muttering that they had to get home for supper, the players drifted out. And the notes that Neale had made remained on the ice-cream table, forgotten.

CHAPTER IX

THE FIRST THRILL

WHEN Buddy and Carrots came out of the candy shop, the students were still waiting.

"Did Irontown score twenty-one runs?" a voice demanded.

Buddy said she had. A murmur ran through the crowd. The captain pushed through and walked away with the coach.

He was sore and angry—at himself. That scene in the shop had been the height of folly. Many times he had restrained himself when the impulse had come to go to the pitcher and talk boy to boy. And now he had done something far worse—he had clashed with Schuyler where the whole nine could hear what was said.

He looked over at Carrots. The huckster boy's eyes were grave.

"Bad business, Buddy," he said.

The captain knew it.

"This thing of flying off the handle—— You shouldn't have done that. It never pays to talk while you're hot. It's the same as a pitcher on the

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mound. If he loses his head and starts to slam the ball, he's gone. And if a fellow loses his head and begins to talk loose, he's gone, too."

Buddy nodded miserably. "But I'm the captain," he said, "and I've had to stand for all Schuyler's trouble making."

"That's why you should have kept quiet," said Carrots.

Buddy stared. "Because he made trouble?"

"No; no. Because you're the captain. The fellows have elected you. You're at the top. Everything you do is watched. You set the pace. If you keep a cool head, the whole nine keeps a cool head. And if you start to get rattly, the whole nine rattles."

Buddy saw that Carrots's logic was sound. He had not only failed himself, but he had failed the nine and the school. Whatever resentment against Schuyler had smoldered would now burst forth. It was a pretty mess he had made of things. Never again, he vowed, would he lose his temper and talk like an idiot.

"The worst part of this whole business," he said gloomily, "is that shot Schuyler made about not being a fool."

"He surely stood up to his guns," Carrots admitted. "Now the question is how many of the fellows think Irontown is going to beat us next Wednesday?"

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Buddy was frightened. If Irontown won, she'd be three full games ahead. Such a lead, with only nine games left to play, would almost be unbeatable.

Oh, how he regretted his haste! Schuyler had professed loyalty and in the same breath had proclaimed bluntly that Fairview could not win. How many of the players had he convinced? One or two, perhaps; certainly no more. How many had he filled with the first seeds of doubt? Oh! there was the sore spot.

And what would happen when Schuyler came to the practice tomorrow, and the day after that, and the day after that?

Would there be quarreling and dissension and strife?

"It's my own fault," Buddy reflected bitterly, "for losing my head."

Carrots, watching his face, made a shrewd guess as to what was passing in his mind. He believed in looking bad situations in the eye, but he did not believe in worrying once the situation had been analyzed. Now he tried to soothe the captain's fears.

"You're sorry for what you said, Buddy, aren't you?"

Buddy nodded.

"Well, how do you know that Schuyler isn't sorry for what he said."

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"That's so," Buddy muttered thoughtfully. His face brightened.

But Schuyler was not in the least in a penitential mood. At home he was storming about his bedroom, throwing books around and now and then punching angrily at the pillows on the bed.

"The nerve of him," he broke out once. "Making a mark of me in front of the fellows. I told him. They *are* fools. Their old nine hasn't a Chinaman's chance."

When supper was ready he went downstairs to the dining-room. His bitter mood still held him. He jerked his napkin angrily and almost upset a glass of water.

"Schuyler!" said his mother.

He mumbled an apology and then glanced, cowed, at his father. Mr. Arch spoke quietly.

"Remember where you are, Schuyler."

He ate his meal in a gloomy silence. When the family arose from the table his father asked him to come into the library. Together they entered the room. Mr. Arch sank into the depths of a wide, comfortable chair and motioned the boy to a seat.

"There's something on your mind, Schuyler, isn't there?"

Schuyler nodded.

"Out with it and let's see if it's as bad as you think it."

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Schuyler, his cheeks red, blurted what had happened in the candy shop.

Mr. Arch put his hands behind his head and leaned back in the chair.

"You haven't liked it here," he said. "Are you sure you haven't carried around a chip on your shoulder?"

"I told them how cheap the school was."

"Cheap?" Mr. Arch's voice was thoughtful.

"Well, it is cheap," Schuyler argued. "They have nothing. They think they can beat schools like Irontown——"

"Don't you think so?"

"No, sir."

"Then why do you object to being asked who you were rooting for?"

"Because I want Fairview to win."

"Do you?" Mr. Arch asked. After a moment he said: "Let us look at this another way. How do you pick your friends, by what they have and by what they wear?"

"No, sir; if a fellow is a good fellow he's all right."

"Then why look down upon Fairview because she's a poor school?"

Schuyler ran his hands back and forth over the arms of his chair.

"It isn't that they have nothing," he blurted. "Everybody seems satisfied to have nothing."

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"Perhaps they're satisfied because they realize Fairview can't have big improvements."

"But if they'd try to get things like Iron-town——"

"Schuyler," his father broke in, "I'm afraid you came to Fairview in a bad spirit. If you haven't got along with the students, it's because of your own actions. I know you, son. One reason I was glad to come here was because I thought you were getting too cocky at Irontown. I thought that here was a little country school that would make you human. Instead, I find you developing into a sulker—and something worse."

"Something worse?" Schuyler asked in surprise.

"A boy who can't be loyal," his father answered.

Schuyler did not lift his eyes. Moment by moment he felt his face grow hotter. He had not bargained for anything like this. He had expected sympathy.

"When you came to Fairview," Mr. Arch went on, "you were through with Irontown. Every ounce of your support should have gone to your new school. Instead, I'm afraid you've been casting Irontown into the faces of your Fairview friends. You have failed to see the big truth—it isn't what a school has that counts; it's what she gives. Aren't the Fairview standards as high as at Irontown—I mean standards of honor?"

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Schuyler thought of Buddy, and Yost, and of Ahrens.

"Yes, sir," he muttered.

"Yet, just because the high school isn't built of granite—— By the way, where does Fairview stand in the baseball league?"

"She's tied for second place."

"Who is first?"

"Irontown."

"Has she a big lead?"

"Two games."

"Two games." Mr. Arch stood up and walked to a book case and ran his eyes over the titles. But instead of taking a volume, he swung back toward the boy. "By all accounts a school like Fairview should be last. She is poor; she is cheap; she has nothing. And yet she is second. Why, son, your school has done nobly. Can't you see that she should be honored for holding such a high place?"

Schuyler did not answer.

"How many games has the nine won?"

"Five."

"How many did you win?"

"One; they—they didn't let me finish that."

"Why?"

"I was weakening." He did not tell about Carrots.

"And so," said Mr. Arch, "not content with

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grouching and sulking, you have not even given the nine your best."

Schuyler sprang to his feet. "Oh, but I have, father."

"You can't give your best when your heart isn't in it," Mr. Arch answered. He placed his hands on the boy's shoulders. "My son, your loyalty is weak, and loyalty is a glorious virtue. You must forget Irontown. You must forget the expensive things that Irontown has. If a group of men, illy-trained, un-drilled, seize muskets and heroically fight an army that has all the advantages, we admire those men and history writes their names big. Don't you see that what made them was courage and loyalty? Here we have a school nine that is not drilled and trained as other nines are trained. Yet it fights and holds its ground. Doesn't that thrill you, son?"

Schuyler's head sank on his breast.

"Doesn't it?" his father asked.

"No, sir," he answered faintly.

The man sighed. "Schuyler," he said, "you are missing the best thing that Fairview has to give you."

The interview was over. Schuyler went out. Upstairs in his room he tried to calm himself and work at his books, but the room seemed cramped—far too cramped for his thoughts. He caught up his cap and hurried outdoors.

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In some way he felt that he had disappointed his father. And yet he did not see why this should be. Was it his fault if he couldn't be in sympathy with Fairview's ways?

His father's charge that he had not given his best stung him. Perhaps the whole school thought it. Perhaps that was what had been in Buddy's mind. His anger, which had been chilled by that talk in the library, now flamed again. He'd ask Buddy the moment he saw him. Nobody was going to spread a story like that.

Next morning, on his way to school, he overtook the captain. Buddy, apprehensive of a clash, prepared himself to hold his tongue in check. The least said would be the soonest mended.

"Look here," Schuyler began, "do you think I'm pitching to lose?"

"No." Buddy's answer was emphatic. "Who said that?"

"Nobody. They had better not say it. But you—you're not satisfied."

"I want you to pitch as a Fairview fellow," Buddy answered.

"I have."

"No; you haven't, Schuyler. You can't when your heart isn't in it."

Here were almost the words his father had used. He tried to make some denial, and couldn't. Instead, he asked sulkily:

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"Do you want me to quit?"

Buddy shook his head. No; he certainly did not want that.

"Why," Schuyler asked, with a touch of the old arrogance. He must be valuable if the captain wanted him to stay after what had happened in the candy shop.

"Because Arthur is our only pitcher if you go," Buddy answered simply.

The answer was not what Schuyler had expected, and it did not please him in the least. In fact, it stung him. He thought that it was a hint that, were pitchers plentiful at Fairview, nobody would care what he did.

During morning classes he decided that he would quit. But when the time for practice came he went to the field house and got into uniform. Some of the players looked at him queerly, but nobody made any reference to what had happened last night.

Buddy had posted one league standing on the bulletin board. Now he tacked another to the wall of the field house:

	W.	L.	PC.		W.	L.	PC.
Irontown	7	1	.875	Pompton	4	4	.500
Lackawanna ...	5	3	.625	Hasbrouck	3	5	.375
Fairview	5	3	.625	Gates	3	5	.375
Saddle River...	5	3	.625	Brunswick	2	6	.250
Bloomfield	4	4	.500	Garrison	2	6	.250

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Schuyler worked that day as he had worked for the past week—cold, silent, unapproachable. Carrots, watching him use his body swing, suddenly called for Buddy's glove. He put it on, pushed the captain out of the way, and signaled for Schuyler's fadeaway.

Five minutes later Carrots took off the glove. He did not say whether the pitching had been good, bad or indifferent, and Schuyler did not ask.

Buddy tried to read Carrots's face, but the huckster boy's countenance was a mask. Something was up. That much was certain. The captain shook his head as though to throw off unpleasant thoughts, and turned his attention to the infield practice. Carrots would probably tell him later.

There was plenty happening on the infield today to give him worry. Neale, ordinarily a sure fielder, was missing ball after ball. Yost seemed unable to hold the leather when it was thrown to him. And Hill and McCarter threw wild time and again.

Carrots labored with a tireless zeal. Not once did he scold. Always his voice carried an encouraging word to the player who had fozzled. Buddy grit his teeth and tried not to think that the Iron-town game was next—and at Irontown, too.

When it came time for hitting practice, Schuyler was sent to the mound. At once the wildness left the fielding and took possession of the batting. The boys swung at anything, and instead of

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the calculating punch they had been taught to use, they went at the ball with wild, heavy lunges.

Buddy was in despair. Apparently the nine had gone to pieces. Tortured and harassed, he felt hot, violent words tremble on his lips. He held them back. He had had one lesson as to what an unbridled tongue could do. And besides, there was Carrots smiling, cheerful, never once showing what he must have felt.

The ghastly work came to an end at last. The players trooped to the field house. Carrots and Buddy remained on the field.

"Scared," Carrots said briefly; "just plain scared."

"Of Irontown?" Buddy asked.

"Of twenty-one runs," Carrots answered, "and of Schuyler's few and words that he's not a fool."

Schuyler! Buddy's muscles twitched. Every way he had turned since the season started Schuyler had been a stumbling block.

"We've got to beat Irontown," Carrots said grimly. "This is getting to be a three-team race. Irontown, Lackawanna and Fairview! They're the nines that will be in at the finish. Saddle River doesn't count. She's lost some of her best players and she's going fast. Oh, I know she's won two of her last five, but one of those two victories was against poor old Garrison. Every team is beating Garrison."

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The huckster boy had begun to walk across the field. Buddy kept step with him. It was all right to talk of beating Irontown, but how was it going to be done with the nine all shot to pieces?

"If we beat Irontown," Carrots went on, "we finish the first half of the race one game behind. I know this Irontown bunch. They've been breezing along in the lead and probably thinking they have everything their own way. If we stop them now, they're going to have something to think about. They're going to worry, and a worried team never plays as good a game as the team that thinks it can't be stopped. If we beat Irontown Wednesday our chances of landing that pennant go up fifty per cent. If we lose——"

"Yes?" Buddy asked.

"I'd sell our chances for a nickel."

The captain shivered. Why couldn't the big moment have come at some other time?

"There's one way to go after that game," Carrots said abruptly. "Use Schuyler."

"Schuyler?"

Buddy's glove fell from his hands. Was Carrots mad?

"It's the play," the coach insisted. "I caught him today. He's right. I don't mean he's master of that body swing, but he has it good enough to get past. In the pinches he can use his old arm movement. He won't tire. He'll last."

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"But against Irontown, Carrots, when he thinks Irontown——"

"He thinks we're sore on him, too. Suppose we tell him we're going to trust him with the Irontown game?"

"Oh!" Buddy saw it then. But it was risky, frightfully risky. This game meant so much. He looked at Carrots doubtful, undecided.

"The nine is scared," the huckster boy argued. "If the game is going to go it will go, anyway. We have everything to gain. If Schuyler comes through and wins, the nine will throw up its heels. They will figure that Schuyler's old hoodoo has been killed. And as for Schuyler—— What will it do to him, Buddy?"

The captain did not know.

"It will give him a different feeling toward the school, won't it, being trusted so much?"

The captain did not know that, either.

"Here," said Carrots. "Just now we're up in the air. If everything goes along in routine we'll stay up in the air. You saw them today. Something must happen to give them a jolt. After what Schuyler said the other day, don't you think they'd be jolted if they heard he was going to pitch?"

Buddy nodded. There was no question but that they would be jolted. But would it do any good?

"It's up to you," said Carrots. "I'm going to the field house."

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Buddy was left out on the field. For a long time he stood with his head bent deep in thought. Then, abruptly, he followed after the coach.

Most of the players were dressed when he reached the house. Schuyler was off in a corner by himself. Buddy paused in the door.

"Schuyler!"

The pitcher looked up. Was this going to be another public reprimand?

"Carrots says you have the body swing now. I'm going to use you Wednesday against Iron-town."

A low sound ran about the room. Schuyler continued to stand there with his shoulders hunched belligerently. After a while his back straightened. The shoulders went back. His head was held high.

"They won't score twenty-one runs Wednesday," he said. None of the old arrogance now—just a calm statement of facts. Carrots gave a quick grin.

In a little while Schuyler went out. He had not spoken to the players, and they had not spoken to him. As soon as he was gone, they gathered in a little knot and whispered. Presently Neale came to where Buddy was dressing.

"Is this right," he asked, "about Schuyler?"

Buddy nodded.

"But if he thinks Irontown has a cinch——"

"He doesn't think it," said Carrots. "He only thinks he thinks it."

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"But the way he's been blowing up late in the game——"

"Fellows," Carrots said earnestly, "he won't blow up at Irontown. You can take my word for it."

But the players did not seem inclined to take anybody's word. Here was a situation that had them guessing. First a player's loyalty was questioned, then he said the school couldn't win, then he was trusted to pitch against the school he thought would win. What could you make of that?

They went out rather silent and with eyes turned away. Carrots and Buddy were left alone.

"Well?" the captain asked.

Carrots shook his head. "They were licked the way they felt today. There's a chance now, anyway."

But next day, when the practice ended, Buddy thought that the chance was slim. The fielding had been just as wretched. The batting had been just as weak. And Schuyler—— Well, Schuyler had been just as silent and distant as before.

"Wait!" said Carrots. "You can't tell what's passing through that lad's head."

Could Buddy have seen the working of Schuyler's mind, he would have been encouraged. For Schuyler had made a grim resolve to win his game.

School loyalty had no part in his thoughts. It was of himself he was thinking. He had been held up before the fellows in a bad light. While noth-

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ing had been said to him, he knew from the atmosphere of the field house that he was in disfavor. Well, he'd give them something else to think about.

Next day, though he rode to Irontown with the players, he was really not one of them. Buddy had a notion to sit next to him and try to make him feel at home. But Carrots said no. It would do better, he thought, to let the pitcher's mind run in its own channels.

"When you trust a fellow," he said, "he's got to make good for you if he's got any white in him at all."

So the captain turned his attention to the other players. It was none too cheerful an outlook. Their talk did not ring with confidence. Plainly they were still scared. And instead of jolting them into a state of hopefulness, Schuyler's selection seemed to have turned their minds on how the pitcher had weakened in his other three games.

"Oh," Buddy groaned under his breath, "why can't they believe Carrots that he won't blow up today?"

When the stage reached Irontown the nine climbed down and walked toward the granite high school building. Schuyler threw back his shoulders and took a deep breath and trudged along with the others.

In the high school locker-room, where they dressed, a cloth sign ran the length of one wall:

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IRONTOWN, 21; LACKAWANNA, 2.

The boys stared at that sign as though fascinated. Even Neale was impressed. Very quietly they went outdoors and walked toward the field.

"If they'd only realize that this Irontown nine is just a school nine," Buddy sighed. "We've played them before."

"If they get to realize that," Carrots answered, "there'll be something doing today."

On the field, Fairview displayed none of her usual zest. When Irontown practiced before the start of the game, the players clustered about their bench and watched. Soon the shortstop made a fumble.

"Ah!" said Buddy. "These fellows can fizzle just like everybody else."

A moment later the third-baseman made a wild throw.

"A little more of it!" Buddy chuckled. "I thought these fellows could play ball."

The first-baseman dropped a ball that came right into his glove.

"Well, well, well." Buddy's laughter was low and merry. "They can drop balls, too, can't they?"

Some of the players were smiling. The talk became a little more eager.

"Keep it up," Carrots whispered. "That's the play."

Mr. Davis and the Irontown umpire stepped out

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to the diamond. The game was about to start. The Irontown pitcher walked to the mound. Pilgrim selected a bat and looked inquiringly at Buddy.

"Use your head," the captain ordered. "Pick out what you want."

Pilgrim hit the second ball along the first-base line, and the first-baseman fumbled just long enough to miss the play.

"Hello!" cried Buddy. "That must be an accident. Irontown couldn't make an error like an ordinary team."

Neale grinned. "Shucks!" he said. "We've beaten better teams than this."

The captain's blood raced. This was the first response. He sent Hill to the plate with instructions to make a fake attempt to bunt and then to hit the ball.

"Gee!" said Carlson. "Irontown won't be fooled by a trick as stale as that."

Hill's attempt to bunt should have convinced anybody that he hadn't meant to hit the ball. Buddy groaned. But the Irontown team seemed not to have noticed the maneuver. When the pitcher hurled the ball again, the Irontown third-baseman ran in. Hill gave the sphere a vicious wallop.

Down the third-base line it flashed. The baseman, caught unprepared, made a wild, sidelong clutch for it, and missed.

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"And so this," Buddy mocked, "is the team that has won seven out of eight."

This time almost the whole bench laughed. Iron-town, apparently, was only made of common clay after all. Discouraged eyes brightened. McCarter's infield fly dimmed Fairview's sudden splurge of courage, but Neale's timely single acted as a tonic. Pilgrim scored with the first run, and Fairview students who had come to the game almost split their throats. The cheering went on even after Yost had hit into a double play and retired the side.

It was now up to Fairview to hold Irontown in check. The players hustled out to their places. Schuyler arose from the bench.

"The body swing until you're in a hole," said Carrots.

Schuyler nodded, and walked to the box. Somebody threw him the ball. He pitched to Buddy until the batter was ready. Then, with the ball held against his chest, he faced the plate, deaf to the rattle of talk that came from the Irontown coaches.

He had always wondered how he would feel if, pitching for Fairview, he should face an Irontown batter. He had had an idea that he might be frightened. Instead, a stern resolve to stop this batter ran through every nerve and muscle of his body. His eyes narrowed craftily. With that long overhand body swing he sent the ball toward his catcher.

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Crack! The batter caught it. Schuyler's face twitched and then was still. He smiled. That ball was sailing lazily toward the outfield. Linqvist caught it when it fell.

"That's the way," yelled the coaches. "We'll be straightening them out in a minute."

Schuyler pitched again. This time the ball was driven toward McCarter. The shortstop stopped it, dropped it, picked it up in a flash and drove it at Yost.

"Out!" ruled the umpire.

"Horseshoes!" mocked the coaches. "Come on, there, old man. Show them where you live."

But the Irontown batter must have lived somewhere in the clouds, for he lifted a high, twisting foul. Hill, prancing like a skittish colt, caught it midway between third and home.

The nine came in to the bench. The first inning was over and Fairview led.

"Three pitched balls," said Carrots. "That's going some, Schuyler."

Schuyler quietly sat down and did not even smile.

The second inning passed, and the third and fourth. Neither team had scored. Fairview's nervousness was gone. She had held Irontown thus far, and she was gradually coming to believe that she would hold her to the finish. And Irontown, who had started the game full of life and vim, was slowly

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settling down to the task of wiping out a lead that had at first seemed slight, merely one run.

Fairview scored again in the fifth, and it was Neale's big bat that once more started the trouble. After McCarter had fanned, Neale shot a single to right. The fielder, moving calmly and carelessly, slipped as the ball came to him on the first bound. It was past him before he could recover his balance.

A yell from the coaches told Neale what had happened. He had begun to ease up as he neared first base and had taken his eyes away from the fielder and the ball. All at once he threw all his power into his stride. He rounded first, sped on to second, rounded that and dashed for third.

"Up!" yelled Pilgrim, who was coaching there. "Stay up; stay up."

Neale slackened his gait and stood panting on the bag. The ball was just reaching the second-baseman who had run out to take the throw. Neale's face clouded. If he hadn't slowed up going to first, he might have been able to score. And now, if he didn't get home, it would be because he had taken it for granted that the ball would be fielded cleanly. And if, in the end, Fairview should lose by one run—— Neale crept off the bag.

Yost tried hard to bring him in, but the first-baseman's liner went right at the pitcher. Carlson came to bat. He swung at the first ball and missed.

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Neale frowned. Carlson wasn't hitting at all to-day. Perhaps it would be best if he tried to steal home. His hands ran from his stomach up to his neck, once, twice. It was the signal that he would try to steal. Carlson tapped his bat twice against the plate. He was prepared.

The pitcher, holding the ball, glanced toward third base. The runner, apparently was glued close to the bag. The pitcher gave his attention to the plate.

He was halfway through his delivery swing when, out of the corner of one eye, he saw a form dashing down the base path. Surprised and confused, he lost his control. The ball went wide, so wide that the catcher was lucky to stop it with his outstretched glove. The second run was in.

Neale jumped up, brushed himself, and ran laughing to the bench. Once more the Fairview cheers swept the field, to be followed by a deep, joyous chant:

Watch those fellows,
Watch those fellows,
Watch those fellows,

THROW THE BALL AROUND!

Carlson struck out. Irontown went to bat. Five minutes later she was in the field again, and the score-board out in deep center read: Fairview, 2; Irontown, 0.

Neither side scored in the sixth. Fairview was

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blanked in her half of the seventh. Irontown came to bat. There was a desperate, do-or-die air about her now. Her rooters stood up and stretched and pleaded for action.

Buddy went to his station—just the least bit nervous. In other games, here was the place where Schuyler had always begun to falter. He looked out across the field. Yost's lips were moving, Neale could not stand still, McCarter was trying to get his cap to set right on his head. Why, the whole team was nervous.

The captain glanced at Schuyler. The pitcher's jaw was set. Evidently he, too, knew that the crucial time had come.

"All right, old man." Buddy crouched behind the batter. "Give it to me here."

Schuyler pitched. The batter fouled. The next offering was a ball. Then came a drop, and the batter drove it out for a long, ringing single.

The infield shifted apprehensively. Was history going to repeat itself?

Schuyler, still using his overhand swing, hit the next batter with the ball.

The Irontown rooters shouted gleefully. The lucky seventh! This was Irontown's inning.

Schuyler's eyes were hard. The body swing was discarded. Using the old arm motion, he fell back upon his fadeaway. The next batter dumped a grounder to Hill and was thrown out at first, but

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the other runners advanced. Irontown boys on second and third!

The infield came in and played to cut off a run at the plate.

Drake, the Irontown captain, was at bat. He was the team's hardest hitter. If he should drive it out——

Every player held his breath as Schuyler pitched. Drake met the ball fairly, and it sailed out to Pilgrim.

The boy on third scored after the catch, and the boy who had been on second went to third. A hit now would tie the score.

The infield played back again. If Schuyler could only get out of this——

"Ball one!" ruled the umpire.

Neale's voice came softly. "Steady, Schuyler; steady, boy."

"Ball two."

McCarter took off his cap and threw it away. If Schuyler stayed on the ground——

"Strike one!"

Ah! That was better. Now if he——

The batter met the ball. McCarter raced in, clutched a twisting grounder with one hand and shot the ball to Yost. The inning was over, and Fairview led by a score of 2 to 1.

Schuyler walked to the bench. Something ran down into his eye. Sweat! He smiled grimly.

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"Arm tired?" Carrots asked.

He shook his head. No; his arm was not tired. But, oh; how frightened he had been out there.

Fairview did not score in her half of the eighth, and took the field again. Once more nervousness swayed the nine. If Schuyler got through this inning——

The first batter crashed a three-bagger over Pilgrim's head.

Even Buddy's stout heart quailed. Schuyler stood on the mound looking down at the ground. Presently, when the ball was thrown to him, he faced the plate. Somehow, his face seemed to have changed.

The ball seemed to leap from his hand. The batter blinked his eyes in surprise.

"Strike one!"

Next time the batter swung, but the ball was in Buddy's glove before his swing was really under way. And then, while he was set to go after speed, a slow ball floated up to the plate and threw him into hopeless confusion.

"Strike three," said the umpire.

"Yah!" Buddy yelled. "That's it, Schuyler, old top! Keep them coming."

Schuyler pitched to the next boy.

"Strike one."

Fairview students, struck dumb by that three-base smash, were finding their voices again. But Schuy-

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ler heard none of their cries. He was watching Buddy. He caught the captain's signals:

"Runner off third! Taking a big lead! Ready! Throw!"

Schuyler whirled and threw the ball to Hill. The runner made a frantic slide back to the bag.

"Out!" ruled the umpire.

Carrots leaned back and smiled genially.

"This game," he said softly, "is about over."

Schuyler faced the plate with a new team behind him. Courage had returned and doubts were gone. Why, this wasn't the same pitcher who had blown up against Saddle River and Lackawanna and Gates. This was a pitcher who could hold his nerve in the pinches. This was some pitcher.

The Irontown boy at bat seemed discouraged by what had happened. He stood still while Schuyler curved two more strikes over the corners. Disgustedly he threw his bat away.

Schuyler came to the bench. Carrots made room for him and told him he was all right. Buddy squeezed his arm.

"Pretty work," the captain cried.

A spot of color came in each of Schuyler's cheeks. There was the score-board out there. Beginning of the ninth and Fairview in the lead. He kept staring at the score as though he could not believe it.

When it came time to take the field again he

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went out slowly. He wasn't going to let victory slip from him now. Carefully he worked, and cautiously, too. The first batter was thrown out by Neale, the next boy popped to Yost, and the last boy was thrown out by Buddy on a splash in front of the plate. The game was over.

In the gym, while he dressed, Schuyler paused every now and then and stared ahead with unseeing eyes. Later, as he sat in the stage, he kept shaking his head and whistling under his breath. He had placed Irontown on a pedestal. He had looked upon her as *the* school. And now she was beaten, beaten by the school that had nothing.

Suddenly a full realization of the victory dawned on him. His eyes ran down the coach from face to face—Yost, Pilgrim, McCarter, Neale, Carlson—— Gosh! what a fight they had made. He saw the worn, shabby bat bag lying at Linquist's feet. He remembered the sewed patches in Hill's uniform. He thought of the showers at Irontown, and the steel lockers, and the handball court, and the batting net—and he thought of handball in a basement with ash barrels at one end and of a field house with numbered hooks in the unpainted walls. This was the team that had beaten Irontown.

A wild burst of song came from the happy students riding home with the nine:

Come, lift your voices, let them ring,
To Fairview's praise and glory;

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No stain shall darken any page
Of Fairview's splendid story——

Something shivery ran up and down Schuyler's back. His body turned cold. A lump choked his throat. His eyes blinked, and blinked, and blinked. He lowered his head—and nobody saw the moisture that blurred his sight.

CHAPTER X

TIED!

BUDDY was a happy boy when he sat down to supper that night. The nine had proved that it was just as good as Irontown. Better still, Schuyler had proved that as a pitcher he was 14-karat gold. Oh, hadn't Carrots been the wise old owl to advise trusting Schuyler with the game?

"I suppose," Bob asked, "you figure you have the pennant cinched?"

"Not much," said Buddy. "We've proved that we have as good a chance as any. Now it's up to us to go out and win."

Bob smiled. Here was a lad whose head wasn't going to be turned by success.

After supper Buddy went up to his room to study. Presently he heard Poole and Wally down in the lower hall. Of late he had not seen much of his friends; he had been too busy with the nine.

"Come up!" he yelled; "come on, fellows."

They came bounding up the stairs. For the next five minutes anybody passing along the hall would have heard the sound of a good-natured battle, and

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cries of "Gee! Wasn't it great?" "Do you remember when Neale stole home?" "Do I remember it? You poor boob, will I ever forget it?" "Gosh! How did you ever get them to play a game like that, Buddy, after the way they practiced?" "I wonder what Irontown is thinking about tonight."

After a while the excited talk died down. The three boys stared soberly at one another.

"The hardest part of the race has come," said Poole. "We're up against the last half now. The fellows must be kept from tiring and going stale."

"Carrots will take care of that," Buddy answered. "He knows."

"And Schuyler——" Wally wrinkled his wide, fat nose. "After what he said in the candy shop—— Gee! I'm lost, Buddy. He pitched as though he hated every Irontown fellow on the lot."

"I guess Schuyler wasn't as much stuck on Irontown as he thought," Poole observed. "When he found himself out there pitching against them, he was for Fairview first, last and all the time."

That was what Buddy thought and what he hoped. But he did not know. Perhaps Schuyler might have been pitching for personal glory. However, he was thankful to take what gifts the baseball gods sent and ask no questions. And yet, deep in his heart, he knew that he would be disappointed if Schuyler did not reach a place where the clean,

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simple ways of Fairview would claim his faith and his love.

By and by the talk turned on how the league stood now. The returns had not all been in when the team left Irontown. Poole, though, had telephoned before coming to the house. He had the results. Crippled Saddle River had been beaten by Hasbrouck, Lackawanna had defeated Garrison, Bloomfield had won from Brunswick and Pompton had defeated Gates.

Wally thought that a plain standing of the teams was not enough. Something had to be done to celebrate this happy occasion. After Buddy had figured the percentages, Wally insisted that he be allowed to write the sign. This was what he produced:

HURRAH!

GOING UP

LOOK WHO'S HERE

	W.	L.	PC.		W.	L.	PC.
Irontown	7	2	.777	Pompton	5	4	.555
Fairview	6	3	.666	Hasbrouck	4	5	.444
Lackawanna ..	6	3	.666	Gates	3	6	.333
Saddle River...	5	4	.555	Brunswick	2	7	.222
Bloomfield	5	4	.555	Garrison	2	7	.222

Next morning Buddy took the sign to school and fastened it to the bulletin board. Soon it was sur-

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rounded by a jostling crowd of laughing boys. Going up! The spirit of the slogan caught their fancy and they made it a rallying cry. Going up! Fairview was going up!

When Schuyler appeared there was a hearty cheer.

His work yesterday had wiped out the sting of what had been said in the candy shop. He had redeemed himself. But Schuyler, though he nodded and smiled, hurried past the students without stopping and went directly to his classroom.

Buddy was disappointed. He had thought to see the pitcher and the fellows get together on a rollicking level of comradeship. Instead, Schuyler seemed only a bit more amiable than before. The captain's eyes clouded.

"Are we never going to have clear sailing?" he muttered.

He had tried to tell himself that he would be thankful merely for games won, but he knew now that he wouldn't. He would never be satisfied until Schuyler would be for Fairview heart and soul. Schuyler would miss so much if he failed to catch the spirit of the Blue and White!

It was a gay, confident nine that assembled at the field that afternoon. Of overconfidence there was none. Each boy seemed to realize that only half the games had been played, and that four more weeks of battle lay ahead.

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They all spoke to Schuyler. And Schuyler, one moment eagerly friendly, the next moment cold with reserve, one moment drew them on and the next moment held them off. Buddy was more puzzled than before.

When Carrots appeared, he told his troubles to the coach. The huckster boy squinted at the pitcher and ran a thoughtful hand across his chin.

"Won't be friends, eh?" he asked.

"Well, not exactly that," said Buddy.

"Carrying that same old chip on his shoulder?"

"No; not that, either."

"He's a queer bird," said Carrots. "I thought if we put him in against Irontown it would end all our troubles."

"It hasn't," said Buddy.

"You can't go over," Carrots complained, "and hit him on the head with a bat and tell him to wake up. We'll have to let him alone."

"But if he just drifts on this way, Carrots, where are we going to get off? The fellows want to be friendly, but they won't stand on their heads just to make him smile."

Carrots stared at Schuyler sitting on the ground and waiting the order to warm up.

"Believe me," the huckster boy said suddenly, "that lad is doing some thinking."

"But what is he thinking about, Carrots?"

Carrots shrugged his shoulders. "You can search

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me. What has he got to think about that should make him so crusty?"

Buddy didn't know.

But Schuyler, had anyone asked him and had he wanted to talk, would have said that he had a whole lot to think about. He was all at sea.

Yesterday, riding home in the stage, Fairview had seemed a wonderful place and her nine a wonderful nine. Since then he had had a night's sleep. The thrill of the Irontown game was gone. And Fairview now seemed just plain Fairview.

But the nine—— There was something that stuck. It still seemed a wonderful nine. Any nine, for that matter, that could beat Irontown, would be wonderful—to Schuyler.

The trouble with him was this: For days and days he had pictured Irontown in his imagination as a giant among schools. He had clothed her with the garments of a wonderful superiority. He had thought her invincible, superb, a mountain among valleys. After the game, with the thrill of victorious battle still tingling his nerves, it had been easy for him to believe in Fairview. Now, though, the habit of weeks was reasserting itself. Old thoughts were coming back. Voices whispered to him that Irontown had been off her game. Was it possible for a little school like Fairview to hold Irontown to one run after she had laced Lacka-

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wanna for twenty-one—that is, if Irontown was right?

Thoughts like these tortured the pitcher. He looked upon the nine with a new respect. It had proved itself. But being a good nine, and being the best nine in the league, were different matters. Was Fairview really stronger than Irontown? Had her victory been a real show of superiority? Or was it a fluke?

He could not believe in the school with a strong, unswerving faith. For all of that, a lot of his old antagonism was gone. That talk with his father had opened his eyes. He saw now that Fairview deserved great credit. Whether or not she won the pennant, she had made a dandy fight. The field house, bare and meager as it was, began to stand for something. And as for handball in the basement—— There was something almost Spartan about that.

Schuyler had an exaggerated sense of false pride, and he could not parade his change of heart before the fellows. He had scoffed and condemned; he could not bring himself to admit that he had been wrong. Besides, there was another side to it. Suppose somebody should say that he saw that the nine was going to amount to something and wanted to climb on the bandwagon?

And so, in spite of friendly hands stretched out to him, he trod his mistaken road.

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Had Buddy known what was in his mind, the captain would have been saved many anxious hours. But Buddy, because he was no mind reader, was forced to tread a road far harder than Schuyler's. Ahead he saw a chance golden and bright with promise. To reach it he had a machine with one uncertain part—Schuyler.

"I wouldn't worry about that," said Carrots. "He's a whole lot better than he was. He doesn't make the talk he used to make. How many games did he pitch in the first half of the season?"

"Four," Buddy answered.

"He lost two. He's a better pitcher now, isn't he?"

"Yes."

"Then he ought to do better than win two games from now to the finish."

Buddy nodded. Schuyler ought to do far better. He shrugged his shoulders and tried to throw off his worry. How simple everything would be if Schuyler would come out of his shell and be a regular fellow!

There was a tendency, that day, to slacken up in practice. Buddy decided that this would never do. When the players, at the finish, walked to the field house, he was last in line. A dozen students followed the players. At the dressing-room door Buddy barred the way.

"We want to talk things over tonight," he said.

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The students grinned and went off about their business. There was a sort of understanding now that there might be times when the nine might want to talk and plan alone. This, evidently, was one of those times.

Inside, Buddy faced the squad.

"Fellows," he said, "there are nine games left. Some of you were loafing today. We can't have any of that. We're still a game behind Irontown, and we must catch up. There's only one way to do that. We must go on winning until she loses."

"And after that?" a voice asked.

"After that," said Buddy, "we must go on winning so that she won't draw into the lead again. How many fellows will promise now to practice as hard as they know how?"

Schuyler's hand went up with the others. That was a good sign, anyway. Buddy timed his dressing so that he left with the pitcher.

"Schuyler," he said, "that scrap in the candy shop is—is wiped out so far as I'm concerned."

The pitcher looked at him steadily. "All right," he said, "we'll forget it."

Buddy's heart beat faster. "I'm counting on you for a whole lot of games won."

Schuyler said nothing. He had lost a lot of his zest for boasting.

Next day, true to its promise, the nine went at the practice as though it was a game. Buddy was

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delighted. When the players went in to dress, he remained on the field with Carrots. Tomorrow Saddle River would come to Fairview for the tenth game. From the way the nine had acted today he didn't fear Saddle River in the least.

"We ought to win easily," he said.

"Did you tell that to the fellows?" Carrots demanded.

"Oh, no. I don't want them lolling around and getting lazy. I told them Saddle River was beginning to pull herself together."

Carrots was relieved. To his way of thinking, a nine that expected trouble was always better than the nine that expected an easy time, for if trouble came it was not caught unprepared.

"The whole race now," he said, "is a question of nerve. It always is in these races where two or three teams are bunched. If Irontown keeps on winning and can't shake us off, she may begin to worry. Then, fluey! She's gone. If we keep on winning and don't gain, we may get discouraged and quit."

"Quit?" Buddy cried.

"Sure," Carrots said calmly. "I don't mean that you'll quit. The fellows might. You can't tell. Big league teams sometimes lose their nerve and quit."

The sound of singing came from the field house.

"We're all right if they keep that up," Carrots

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said. "When a team sings, it's full of pep. We've got to keep it that way."

"Why won't it stay that way?" Buddy asked.

Carrots shrugged his shoulders. "Suppose Fairview and Irontown keep on winning? Suppose some fellow begins to moan and shake his head and say, gee, isn't Irontown ever going to lose?"

Buddy's face became thoughtful.

"Or suppose," Carrots said, "some Fairview fellow jumped in there first and twisted things his way? Suppose instead of saying, wasn't Irontown ever going to lose, this Fairview fellow asked how much longer could they hold us back?"

"Oh!" Buddy saw it then. One way the question sounded like the specter of defeat. The other way it was a rallying call, a notice of victory in the end.

Next day was Saturday. There was no school. For all of that, Buddy went to the frame school building in the morning and tacked a sign across the top of the bulletin board. The sign read:

HOW LONG CAN IRONTOWN HOLD US
BACK?

"I guess that fixes things," he said.

Directly after dinner he went to the field house and got into uniform. One by one the players appeared. He let them lounge in the house as long as

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they liked, but once their uniforms were on they were sent to the field and told to work. Loafing out of uniform was permitted; sloth had to depart the moment pants and shirt and cap and belt went on.

Saddle River came to the field house just the shadow of the team that Fairview had played at the start of the season. She took her practice in a dead, dreary fashion. The start of the game found her weak and uncertain, and with no heart to wage a battle. Fairview scored almost as she pleased.

As a league game it was a farce. Arthur Stone struck out fourteen batters. Only three balls were hit to the Fairview outfield.

When the slaughter was over at last Buddy and the Saddle River captain walked in together.

"Aren't we some team?" the visiting captain asked bitterly. "That's what you get when fellows won't play fair to themselves or their school. If some of our players had studied instead of loafing—— Oh, well; there's no use whining."

Twenty minutes later the Saddle River boys were gone. Somebody yelled that it was time to get to the candy shop and get the results. Suppose Pompton had beaten Irontown? That was possible. Pompton had won five and lost four. She could put up a fight.

But when the news came to them over the telephone, they found that Irontown had won. So had Lackawanna, Hasbrouck and Garrison.

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Monday a new league standing graced the bulletin board:

	W.	L.	PC.		W.	L.	PC.
Irontown	8	2	.800	Bloomfield	5	5	.500
Fairview	7	3	.700	Pompton	5	5	.500
Lackawanna ...	7	3	.700	Gates	3	7	.300
Hasbrouck	5	5	.500	Garrison	3	7	.300
Saddle River...	5	5	.500	Brunswick	2	8	.200

And above it was the question:

HOW LONG CAN IRONTOWN HOLD US BACK?

It took the players by storm. Somehow, it seemed to put Irontown on the defensive. Fairview was chasing her, and the moment she stumbled she would be caught.

Schuyler stared at the question a long time. Its optimism and its courage stirred him. It was fine of Fairview to face the future unflinchingly with the odds against her. But——

But Irontown had the advantages. There was no getting around that. Could a brave army, carrying shot guns, beat an army using high powered rifles? Of course not! He stole a glance at the eager faces around him. What a pity they were going to be disappointed. What a pity Fairview didn't have the big things—things that would put

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her on an even footing with Irontown, for instance.

Several times that afternoon Schuyler's mind drifted from his lessons. He wondered how Irontown looked upon Fairview. Did the Blue and White worry her? He tried to picture Irontown, with her wide, rich, granite school house, giving a second thought to little Fairview. The picture would not come. It seemed as improbable as an elephant worrying over an ant.

That afternoon the students came to the field in a body. While the nine dressed, the fellows sang the school hymn with a new depth of feeling. Twice Schuyler paused in his dressing to listen; and when he finally went out for practice he was softly humming the air.

During the warm-up he was sure that Buddy was hoping he would say something. He asked himself miserably what he could say. That the nine would surely overhaul Irontown? How could he say that when, deep in his soul, he had his doubts?

He was afraid that boys would come to him with that very question. In fact, he had feared such a cross-examining ever since the victorious return from Irontown. It was something he wanted to dodge. He had no itch to have students grin at him and ask him had he changed his mind.

The moment the warm-up was over, he jerked on his sweater and walked away. Buddy sighed and turned toward the infield.

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Carrots had sent word that he would not get to the practice that day. Buddy was glad that he had to handle the work alone. It kept him busy. It gave him something to think about other than Schuyler.

Today he continued his policy of permitting no loafing in uniform. Ready, aim, fire! That's how the practice went. As the players caught their stride, he told himself gleefully that he had never seen faster fielding.

"Come on, fellows!" he cried. "We're after a pennant. Get into the game."

McCarter fumbled a grounder.

"That won't give us a pennant," yelled Neale. "After it, Mac."

The shortstop scrambled for the ball, slipped, fell, and threw from his knees. The ball reached Yost's glove.

"Yah!" cried Buddy. "That's the stuff."

Schuyler's pulse quickened. If the nine could play that way for the rest of the season——

"Oh, forget it," he groaned under his breath. "Irontown fields well, too." He turned away and bumped into Poole.

"Great work," said the president of the A. A. nodding toward the field.

"Fine," said Schuyler. Poole was one of the boys with whom, up to this time, he had been unable to get along.

"Dandy game you pitched Saturday."

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Plainly Poole was sincere. Instantly Schuyler wanted to get away. He was human; he liked to be told that he had done well. But just at present, with everybody around him sure of Fairview's final triumph, he felt like a traitor.

He mumbled a reply and hurried to the field house. Poole gave a low whistle. Was Schuyler sorry he had beaten Irontown?

"He can't be," Poole said. "He was working every minute to win." Yet, why should he hurry away when the game was mentioned? The president of the A. A. for once was up a tree.

After the Irontown game the players had been willing to take Schuyler back as though nothing had ever happened. Now, though, his strange silence was building up another structure of doubt and misunderstanding. Poole was not the only boy who wondered.

Buddy became aware of this next morning. Three of the players—Pilgrim, Hill and Carlson—spoke to him at different times. What was the matter with Schuyler? Didn't he think they were good enough to talk to? Did he think he was something superior? Of course, he could pitch. They admitted that. But, mackerel, did that give him any license to think he was a Lord High Muck-a-muck?

"Look here, fellows," Buddy said in desperation, "he hasn't said anything, has he?"

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"Said anything?" Carlson gave a laugh. "He won't say anything, that's the trouble."

"But if he goes on pitching winning ball for us——"

"I guess we can stand for his airs if he does that," said Carlson.

But Buddy knew that they couldn't. There was bound to be friction.

"When Schuyler was losing," the captain wailed, "I was in trouble. Now he's winning and I'm in trouble anyhow."

That afternoon he told his woes to Carrots. The huckster boy pulled his cap down over his eyes and stood motionless, lost in thought. Suddenly he shook his head as though he had made up his mind.

"Wait until after the practice," he said. "Get things moving."

Things moved. Throws were fast and sure, and difficult catches were made to look easy. Arthur was sent to the mound to pitch to the batters, and they gayly pounded his delivery to a fare-thee-well. Schuyler, thinking he would not be used today, started in to dress.

"O Schuyler!" Carrots called. "Wait."

Schuyler waited. The practice was brought to a close. He and Buddy and Carrots were left alone on the field.

"Schuyler," Carrots said, "suppose I told you

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that, in order to be a winning pitcher, you ought to stand on your head for a few minutes every day?"

Schuyler's face went blank with astonishment.

"Come on; suppose I told you that. What would you do?"

"I'd do it," Schuyler answered.

"Why?"

"I'd figure I ought to do what you ordered for the good of the team."

"That's the answer." The coach seemed immensely pleased. "Now, suppose I told you that a certain fellow on the team was mooning around, and that some of the players thought he had airs, and that this feeling was going to hurt the team's chances. What would you say to that?"

Schuyler was silent a moment. "I'd say that fellow ought to talk," he said.

"I guess we'll go in, Buddy," Carrots said. They walked away, and left Schuyler to think it out.

Five minutes later the pitcher followed them into the field house. Pilgrim had the hook next to his, and he said a word about a catch that the outfielder had made that day. Before he started for home, he had found occasion to speak to several others.

He meant well. Buddy could not question that. But his advances were forced and unnatural. It was almost as though he said aloud, "Fellows, I'm

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going to make myself talk to you whether I want to or not." Buddy went home to supper not much happier than he had been that morning.

Schuyler went home about as cheerful as a mangy dog. He knew that his conversation had not sounded real. He had seen a question in several eyes. He did not want to be a drag on the nine; he wanted to help.

But he couldn't; not in the way he wanted to, anyway. Irontown—the imposing Irontown of granite school house and steel lockers—overwhelmed his imagination.

Schuyler was finding his position more trying each day. Not so long ago he had been a leader in the school. Boys had looked up to him. Now, apparently, all was changed. He no longer went to the field house at night. So far as he could see, his presence was not even missed. It was as though he had dropped out of school entirely.

He knew that his own actions had brought this about. The players were willing to be friends. But friendship, he thought, was a clean, honest give-and-take arrangement. How could he be that kind of friend when he had nothing to give but doubts?

Next day the team would go to Brunswick for a game. Brunswick was in last place, having won two games out of ten. By rights it was his game, because Arthur Stone had pitched against Saddle

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River. He wondered if what had been said to him that day would make any difference. Would Arthur be sent to the mound?

In the morning, when he came to school, the batteries for the game were posted on the bulletin. Arch and Jones! So he was going to pitch.

Carrots O'Toole did not make the trip to Brunswick. But when the nine came back, five hours later, he was waiting in front of the post office.

"Did you win?" he demanded.

"Schuyler shut them out," said Buddy. "They got three hits."

The coach's eyes found the pitcher in the crowd. He was walking with Hill and Yost—*and he was talking!*

It had become the custom, the moment the nine reached home from an out of town game, to go at once to the candy shop and telephone. The players walked along in a compact body. Carrots was in the center.

"Keep it up, fellows," he urged. "Irontown's going to trip, as sure as you're born. This is our sixth straight win. We've got them worried. Write that in your little book, fellows; we've got them worried."

Schuyler stopped talking. Was it possible? Was Irontown fretting about Fairview?

They came to the candy shop and stormed in through the doorway. Somebody suggested a plate

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of ice cream before finding out anything. Several of the boys stopped uncertainly.

The telephone rang, long, and loud, and incessant. Schuyler was nearest to the instrument.

"Answer it, Schuyler," somebody called.

The pitcher put the receiver to his ear. "Hello! Yes, this is Fairview. Who won? We did. Score? We shut them out."

There was a moment of silence. Schuyler turned a thoughtful face toward the players.

"Want the results, Buddy?" he asked. "Irontown is on the wire."

"Irontown?" Carrots gave a crowing laugh. "She's calling us now. I told you she was worried."

The excitement died down. Schuyler called the results as they came to him. Irontown had beaten Gates, Hasbrouck had won from Pompton, Saddle River had lost to Lackawanna, and Garrison had beaten Bloomfield.

"Get it?" Schuyler asked. Buddy nodded, and the pitcher called a "Thank you," and hung up the receiver.

The thoughtful look on his face had deepened. Buddy took a quick step forward. Like an inspiration, something of the truth dawned on him.

"Who called then, Schuyler?" he asked. "Did you recognize the voice?"

Schuyler nodded.

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"Who was it?"

"Drake."

"The Irontown captain," Carrots yelled. "Now they are worried."

The players had no thought of cream now. They flocked out of the place. Schuyler, hugging his suit case, got away and walked home alone.

Irontown was worried! At last he knew the truth. Not because Carrots had said so. Oh, no! He had stronger evidence than that. Drake's voice had been tense with anxiety.

Irontown afraid of little Fairview! He stood still, and dropped his suit case, and mopped his brow. And a thrill greater than the thrill he had felt riding home from Irontown ran through him.

"My eye!" he breathed. "We have a chance for that pennant. I'll bet Buddy won't be able to eat his supper tonight."

But there Schuyler was wrong. Buddy ate a supper that made his mother's eyes stick out. He felt bully from the highest hair of his head right down into his toes. Fortune was coming his way!

He was sure that he had solved Schuyler's problem. He had seen it in Schuyler's face. The pitcher had wanted to believe in Fairview and couldn't. But Drake's voice over the telephone had changed all that.

He told Bob about the game, and about that call from Irontown, and about Schuyler and about the

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team's chances. Then, when his story was at an end, he rushed upstairs and caught up the schedule and studied it—not only the games to be played, but also the games that were past.

Soberly he came to school next morning and tacked a new league standing to the board:

	W.	L.	PC.		W.	L.	PC.
Irontown	9	2	.818	Saddle River...	5	6	.454
Fairview	8	3	.727	Bloomfield	5	6	.454
Lackawanna ...	8	3	.727	Garrison	4	7	.363
Hasbrouck	6	5	.545	Gates	3	8	.272
Pompton	5	6	.454	Brunswick	2	9	.181

The students crowded into the hall to study the standing. Buddy faced them and raised his hand. They crowded closer until presently students and players were all grouped in front of him, the last boys just inside the front door.

"Fairview's chance has come," he said. "Next Saturday we play Garrison, and we must win."

"She's third from last," said a voice. "We'll beat her."

"No game is won until it's won," said Buddy. "We must play against Garrison just as hard as though we were playing against the leader."

"Ah, come now, Buddy," a voice laughed.

"Don't forget," said Buddy, "what I've told you. Fairview's chance has come. Next Saturday Iron-town plays Hasbrouck."

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The captain's seriousness silenced the students. Heads were craned to see where Hasbrouck stood.

"She's only won six," a boy said at last.

"She's won her last four," Buddy said. "She's playing hard. She's driving ahead, and a team that's driving ahead is hard to stop. Did any of you ever hear how the Boston Braves stormed through the National League and won a pennant? They got going and there was no stopping them. Maybe Irontown won't stop Hasbrouck next Saturday."

By the time classes were dismissed that afternoon, the entire school had caught the spirit of preparedness. The nine went at its work as though some great obstacle lay ahead. Boys who slackened for a moment were urged on by other players. Drive, drive, drive! The ball flew around the infield as though it had wings. And when an outfielder made a catch, he hustled the leather back as fast as he could.

Schuyler found himself caught up and whirled off with the others. Fairview's chance! Was Buddy right? Was this the big moment the Blue and White had almost prayed for?

"Somebody pitch to the batters," cried Carrots.

"I will." Schuyler sprang forward.

The huckster boy caught his arm. "Hold on there. You pitched yesterday."

"I won't overdo," Schuyler pleaded. "Save Ar-

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thur for Garrison." He went out to the mound, and slowly a wide grin spread over Carrots's face. He'd have great news for Buddy that night.

And when he told it, the captain straightened his tired back and heaved a great sigh of relief.

"Carrots," he said, "that pennant looks a whole lot nearer."

Saturday the team went to Garrison. Wally Hamilton had secured a copy of a weekly newspaper printed at Irontown. On the sporting page was a column review of the league season. One paragraph Wally read to them with great excitement:

Fairview High School has been one of the surprises of the season. For a while it looked as though she was going to have an in-and-out season. A lack of pitchers bothered her. Suddenly Arch began to win. At first he seemed to be followed by a hoodoo, and kept losing games in the last few innings. He has gotten over that. Against Irontown he was as steady as the best of them. Now that he and Stone are going along in good shape, Fairview is one of the teams that must be considered.

A little smile crept to Schuyler's face. You could just bet that Fairview had to be considered! The praise of his own pitching brightened his eyes but did not make him cocky. A month ago he would have strutted like a peacock.

The Garrison game did not amount to much—as a game. Fairview, taking no chances, played as

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though everything was at stake. One run in the first inning, two in the third, one in the fourth and three in the fifth. And meanwhile, Garrison had been able to squeeze but one lonely tally out of Arthur Stone's pitching.

The sixth inning began with Carrots yelling to go at them just as though Fairview did not have a six run lead. The final score was 10 to 3.

"Seven straight," cried Neale. "That's a league record."

Home the nine rode. At first they were noisy and boisterous and eager to rejoice. But as they neared Fairview the clamor died down. What had Irontown done?

A pushing, restless crowd of students met the stage when it stopped outside the post office. Poole had not been able to go with the nine. He made a megaphone of his hands.

"The Irontown game isn't over yet."

Instantly on the stage there was commotion. Not over yet? Then it must be an extra-inning game. The players hurried to the candy shop. A call to Irontown brought the same message that Poole had given—not over yet.

Schuyler waited around for a while, and then grew nervous. He went outside and began to walk about. Before he knew it he was several blocks from the shop. He kept on going. Reaching a street that was new to him, he followed it. Up,

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up, it lead him, and then it ended abruptly as though those who had made the thoroughfare had quit for the day and had forgotten to come back.

He looked around him. Down below, snuggled in a little hollow, was the high school. Its walls, faded and gray, rose peacefully from the stretches of lawn—the same lawn at which he had sneered on his first day. The trees, green branches reaching out like protecting veils, completed a picture of calm and quiet.

He had never before seen Fairview look like this. A warm glow expanded in his heart. How wise his father had been! Truly, pomp and show did not count. Granite walls meant nothing. It was the school itself that counted—its code, what it stood for, what it was. Fairview, with her lawn and her trees and her weather-beaten building, was as truly worthy as Irontown for all her splendor.

What a fool he had been, he thought. Irontown had lockers and shower baths, and Fairview hadn't. But Fairview had something that mighty Irontown would never have—comradeship. At Irontown he had known only about one-quarter of the students. Here he knew every boy. Irontown was big, and boys were lost in its bigness. Modest Fairview was like a family.

He had wondered, in the past, how the little school could hope to turn out a nine that would fight the big school. He knew, now. The little school

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was knit together. Every hope was a common hope, and every fear was a common fear. The little school was a compact, bubbling kernel of fighting energy. The big school was like gunpowder thrown around loosely and at large. The little school was dynamite.

He looked down at the building for another moment before turning away. Halfway back to the candy shop he heard a faint cheer. Did it mean—— He caught his breath, and began to run.

But long before he reached the candy shop the glorious news was being cried up and down Main Street. Hasbrouck had beaten Irontown in a sixteen-inning game.

Fairview and Irontown were tied!

CHAPTER XI

FIGHTING FOR THE PENNANT

FIFTEEN minutes later the celebration began to die down. Throats grew tired and voices became weak. The crowd broke up.

Schuyler went off alone. So far as he was concerned there was something lacking. He had a sweater home with an "I" on it, and at the bottom of a bureau drawer he had a collection of Irontown souvenirs. But there was nothing to proclaim that he was a Fairview student.

A short distance from the candy shop was a stationery store. Schuyler walked that far. After a quick look around he ducked in through the doorway.

But watchful eyes had seen him. Neale peered in through the window, and promptly went back to the candy shop and whispered to Carrots and to Buddy.

The captain was quick to grasp the situation. "Monday morning we'll post the league standing," he said. "The bulletin board ought to be decorated with red, white and blue ribbon. Suppose we go to the stationery store and buy some?"

There were cries of "Go to it, Buddy." The captain led them out.

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Schuyler, his purchase not yet completed, heard voices and the sound of many footsteps. He swung around toward the door. Slowly an embarrassed color ran into his cheeks, and he tried to hide something behind his back.

"We saw it, Schuyler," Buddy said.

Schuyler's hands came into view. They held a flag—the Blue and White of Fairview.

"This isn't just because the nine has gone into first place," Schuyler said stiffly.

"Of course it isn't," said Buddy.

"Schuyler," Carrots added, "we've been wise that you felt this way for a long time."

Of course, that wasn't exactly true, but it conveyed to the other boys that the sneering, superior Schuyler of old was gone. In a flash all restraint vanished. Somebody asked him what he thought about decorating the bulletin board, and Buddy shrewdly consulted his judgment as to which of two ribbons to buy. Before they left the store Schuyler felt thoroughly—and happily—at home. He could be one of them now, for he, too, believed in Fairview.

And how he did talk! It was as though his tongue, having at last been loosed, wanted to make up for all the time it had lost. He found Yost holding one arm and saying, "That's right, old man," and Neale walking on the other side with a hand on his shoulder.

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Carrots nudged Buddy in the ribs. "That lad will talk for a week," he whispered.

"Gee!" Buddy whispered back. "Doesn't it sound good to hear him?"

It surely did sound good. Buddy went home at peace with all the world. And Schuyler went home happier than he had been in many months. After supper he rummaged through the library for a book. Without thinking he began to sing:

Come, lift your voices, let them ring,
To Fairview's praise and glory;
No stain shall darken any page
Of Fairview's splendid story.
Then here's to her, long may she light
The path of honor——

"I never heard you sing that before," Mr. Arch said from behind his paper.

"You'll hear me sing it often now," Schuyler smiled. His eyes met those of his father. "You were right," he said frankly, and went upstairs to hang Fairview's flag in his room.

Monday the school bulletin board carried the latest figures of the league standing:

	W.	L.	PC.		W.	L.	PC.
Fairview	9	3	.750	Pompton	6	6	.500
Irontown	9	3	.750	Bloomfield	5	7	.416
Lackawanna ...	8	4	.666	Gates	4	8	.333
Hasbrouck	7	5	.583	Garrison	4	8	.333
Saddle River...	6	6	.500	Brunswick	2	10	.166

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There was general rejoicing because Gates had done the unexpected and had beaten Lackawanna, thus pulling her back. There was also some uneasiness about Hasbrouck.

That afternoon, with the door of the field house locked, Buddy addressed the nine.

"There are six games left," he said, "and it looks as though four teams will fight it out—Fairview, Irontown, Lackawanna and Hasbrouck. Wednesday we play Lackawanna. If we beat her, she's out of it. That would leave Hasbrouck, Fairview and Irontown. Fellows, we've got to play ball every minute. The schedule is against us."

Schuyler crowded forward. "How's that, Buddy?" Never more would the captain be addressed as "Jones."

"Hasbrouck has three games to play with the weak teams. Irontown also has three games to play with the weak teams. We have only two. That means that we have four tough games, and the others have three tough games."

"All games are tough games," said Carrots O'Toole.

But the fellows knew what Buddy meant. Silently they went out to the field. Their faces were a bit grim.

There was a new quality to the practice today. Heretofore it had been fast and spirited. Now, to these qualities was added determination.

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Schuyler pitched to the batters for fifteen minutes. While he was on the mound he put everything he had on the ball. Buddy looked at him anxiously.

"Make them hit against real pitching," Schuyler said. "They may have to do some batting to win some of these games."

"But if you strain your arm——"

Schuyler laughed. "No fear. That body swing is getting easier all the time." He was happy to be out there serving and giving his best.

Wednesday Lackawanna came to Fairview and bowed to Schuyler's skill. Time after time she had runners on the bases, and time after time Schuyler pitched himself out of holes. The final score was 6 to 2.

"That settles us," the Lackawanna captain sighed when both teams were in the field house.

Buddy thought so, too, but he did not voice this opinion. Instead he asked:

"How did Irontown come to beat you 21 to 2?"

The visiting captain's eyes snapped. "She caught us on an off day, and she rubbed it in. That game broke the spirit of this team. She needn't have scored all those runs, but she wanted to make us feel cheap. We were pushing her pretty hard just then." He dropped his baseball stockings into his grip. "She'll pay for that though," he added.

Buddy was interested. "How so?"

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"We have another game with her, and we're going to even things up. How about it, fellows?"

The Lackawanna players nodded. They were very much in earnest.

Half an hour later Buddy knew what had happened around the circuit. Irontown, Pompton, Brunswick and Hasbrouck had won their games.

"Hasbrouck again!" Neale said. "She's going some."

"We play her next week," said Pilgrim.

Several of the boys looked thoughtful. Buddy worked out the league standing:

	W. L. PC.				W. L. PC.		
Fairview	10	3	.769	Saddle River..	6	7	.461
Irontown	10	3	.769	Bloomfield	5	8	.384
Hasbrouck	8	5	.615	Garrison	4	9	.307
Lackawanna ...	8	5	.615	Gates	4	9	.307
Pompton	7	6	.537	Brunswick	3	10	.230

The fight now lay between Fairview, Irontown, and Hasbrouck, with five more games to play. Hasbrouck had Buddy worried, but he did not show it. He believed in telling the nine they had a fight on their hands. It kept them from loafing and becoming careless. But as for showing concern—— Oh, no. That would be like saying you thought you were going to get licked.

Thursday he threw the squad into its practice with the same old vim. It was easier, now, to keep

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them up to the mark. The scent of victory was in their nostrils and they were keen for their work. Added to that, the students came to the field each afternoon and cheered and sang. It helped a lot.

Arthur went to the mound that day and pitched as hard as Schuyler had pitched in practice. For all of that, the players clouted his delivery to all corners of the field. When the baiting was over Carrots and Buddy called him aside.

"Wrist hurt you again?" the captain asked.

"N-no," said Arthur. He worked the muscles. "N—" He paused.

"Does hurt you," said Carrots.

"A little," the pitcher agreed. He moved the wrist again. "I can scarcely feel it. I wouldn't know anything was wrong if you hadn't made me look for it. I guess it will be all right."

"Sure," said Carrots. He and Buddy walked toward the field house, but they walked so slowly that all the players were in before they came to the door. They paused.

"Is—is it all right?" Buddy asked.

Carrots shook his head. "You can't tell. It doesn't hurt him enough. Maybe, in a full game, he'd get lambasted. Maybe he wouldn't. I've had kinks that worked out."

"And some that didn't?" the captain asked.

Carrots nodded. "We play Bloomfield Saturday. Put him in and see how it goes."

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"But if he gets pounded——" Buddy began in a sudden panic. Was the prize going to slip from his grasp at this late day?

"You've got to take a chance," said Carrots. "Schuyler can't pitch the whole schedule."

Buddy went home with the conviction that he wasn't going to get much fun out of life until the Bloomfield game was over.

Saturday Bloomfield came to Fairview. During the warm-up Buddy watched Arthur narrowly. When he came to the bench Carrots spoke out of the corner of his mouth:

"All right?"

"He is and he isn't," Buddy answered fretfully. "Sometimes the ball has a hop, and sometimes it comes in dead."

"Don't use his curves unless you have to," Carrots advised. "Sometimes a pitcher can get away with it with only a straight ball if he has control."

It was many a day before Buddy forgot the Bloomfield game. Before the first inning was over he was sweating with misery and uncertainty. Bloomfield hit Arthur freely, and scored freely, too. But Fairview's bats were also busy, and the end of the fourth inning found the score tied at 6-6.

Buddy and Carrots whispered on the bench. They asked Arthur if his wrist hurt. He said it did not, and they knew he spoke the truth.

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"Keep him in," said Carrots.

So Arthur remained on the mound, and in the sixth inning came the deluge. The score was still tied, and one Bloomfield boy was out. When the next Bloomfield boy singled, the blow did not look disastrous. Bloomfield had been singling with great frequency.

The next batter got his base on balls. That looked a bit serious. Arthur stretched his arms as though they bothered him.

Buddy thought fast. Should he take Arthur out? He'd wait a moment and try the next batter. He signaled for a high ball on the outside corner.

The batter met it and drove it past Carlson for a home run. The score was now 9 to 6. Buddy's throat went dry. So long as the bases were clear, he might just as well keep Arthur in. The next two boys were easy out. Fairview came to the bench.

"How's the wrist now?" said Carrots.

"It's beginning to pain," Arthur answered. "At the old place where I bumped it against the desk."

Buddy turned to Schuyler. Schuyler and Ahrens had been tossing a ball to each other ever since the game started.

"Try Ahrens," Carrots whispered. "If they hit you can yank him at once. Don't waste Schuyler unless you have to."

Fairview did not score, and at the beginning of

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the seventh inning Ahrens went out to try his luck. On the bench Arthur sat huddled, a forlorn, heart-sick figure.

Schuyler was ready to jump to the rescue, but he was not needed. Bloomfield found Ahrens's slow ball a complete mystery. Three little pop flies settled her. Again Fairview came to the bench.

"Irontown's playing Garrison today," said Carrots.

The information was like a dash of cold water. Garrison was next to last. Irontown would probably win. If she did, Fairview would be back in second place.

Bravely the Blue and White fought for runs. The "breaks" went against her. Carlson, Linquist and Buddy all hit the ball hard, but it went straight at waiting fielders.

Neither side scored in the eighth, and Bloomfield did not score in her half of the ninth. Fairview went to bat. It was now—or never.

And the baseball fates ruled that it should be never. Neale, the surest hitter on the team, was too anxious. He struck out. Yost's grounder burned the grass, but the second-baseman smothered it and threw him out. Carlson drove a liner at the pitcher—and the game was over.

If Irontown had won—— The players tumbled out of their uniforms, got into street clothes and ran to the candy shop.

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Irontown had won. The tie was broken. Fairview was in second place.

Schuyler wanted to cry.

Few boys looked at the league standing Monday morning:

	W.	L.	PC.		W.	L.	PC.
Irontown	11	3	.785	Bloomfield	6	8	.428
Fairview	10	4	.714	Saddle River...	6	8	.428
Hasbrouck	9	5	.642	Gates	5	9	.357
Lackawanna ...	8	6	.571	Garrison	4	10	.285
Pompton	8	6	.571	Brunswick	3	11	.214

Those few boys who did study the standing remarked that Hasbrouck was still climbing.

Over Sunday Buddy had moped in despair. Poole and Wally had come to the house and had tried to cheer him, but had failed and had gone away depressed. Bob said nothing until Monday. After breakfast, before starting for work, he came up to Buddy's room.

"Kid," he said, "when you're up against it, there's one of two things to do."

"What's that?" Buddy asked.

"Quit or fight."

It was the dash of spice that Buddy needed. The hopeless look left his eyes. His mouth straightened.

"I won't quit," he said. His brain began to plan.

He was face to face with the toughest problem of the season. The nine was a game behind and

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might lose heart. Arthur's wrist was gone—for how long nobody could tell. Schuyler alone was left, with four more games to play.

There was one big chance. If ten days' rest would bring Arthur's wrist around, and if Schuyler could win the next three, Fairview might beat Iron-town in the final game. That would create a tie, and the league would order a play-off to decide the winner.

As soon as Buddy reached school that morning he started in to restore confidence. Irontown's one-game lead? Pshaw! That was nothing. They had another game to play with Irontown, didn't they? Hadn't they beaten Irontown once? Couldn't they do it again? Of course they could.

That would tie them up again, wouldn't it? Well, in the play-off what was to prevent them from beating Irontown the third time and walking off with the championship?

It was desperate logic. Many boys knew it. But they had been looking for something on which to base a hope and Buddy had offered what they wanted. The school began to cheer and yell. Nobody asked what would happen if Fairview lost again. Nobody asked about Arthur's wrist.

Carrots came early to the field that day, and at once Buddy took him aside. After a moment they called Arthur. He said the pain in his wrist was almost gone.

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Carrots frowned. "Almosts won't get us anything. All right, Art. Don't pitch a ball today."

The pitcher went back to the boys with whom he had been talking.

"He's got to have rest," Carrots said.

"How long?" Buddy asked.

The coach shrugged his shoulders. A rest might bring him around, and it might not.

"Schuyler is strong enough to pitch two full games a week," Buddy argued.

"It isn't strength that counts," said Carrots. "It's the strain of knowing that he's got to win his games, and that there's nobody to help if they pound him. And—and——"

"And what?" Buddy asked.

"One of those games is against Hasbrouck," said Carrots.

After that came silence. Somehow, Hasbrouck seemed more threatening than Irontown.

"Suppose we ask Schuyler," Buddy suggested at last.

They shouted for the pitcher. He came toward them with his cap off, his rumpled hair breeze-tossed and tumbled, and a laugh in his eyes and on his face. He wasn't a bit like the Schuyler of old.

"Art's wrist needs a rest," said Buddy. "A big rest. Can you win the next three games?"

Schuyler's face became serious. "I can try," he answered.

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"A rest may put Arthur right for the Irontown game," Carrots explained.

"I'll do my part," said Schuyler. Not a muscle twitched to show that he realized that he was cutting himself off from a chance to work in the game that might make or mar Fairview's baseball fortunes. In fact, he had not thought of Irontown.

Before the day was out the school knew the truth. Arthur was out of it for at least a week, and maybe for the season. Carrots had ordered that he should not pitch a ball for a week.

There was some consternation among the students, but the players, after one dazed moment, rallied to Schuyler's aid. They told him that he could do it and that there was nothing to fear. Schuyler smiled quietly. He knew that he faced a task.

Wednesday he pitched against Gates. Fairview won by a score of 8 to 6. There were murmurs because Gates had scored so often, but these did not come from the nine. The players knew that Schuyler had saved his arm as much as possible. He had been content to win, and after that the score did not interest him. Any of the players could have told you that he was saving his strength for Hasbrouck.

An hour later the school knew that Irontown had beaten Brunswick, Hasbrouck had won from Bloomfield, Lackawanna had won from Pompton,

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and Garrison had triumphed over the still slipping team from Saddle River. The league standing read:

	W.	L.	PC.		W.	L.	PC.
Irontown	12	3	.800	Bloomfield	6	9	.400
Fairview	11	4	.733	Saddle River...	6	9	.400
Hasbrouck	10	5	.666	Gates	5	10	.333
Lackawanna ...	9	6	.600	Garrison	5	10	.333
Pompton	8	7	.533	Brunswick	3	12	.200

The hardest test came next—Hasbrouck. And while Fairview was battling there, Irontown would be toying with poor, crippled Saddle River. If Fairview lost——

Buddy refused to think of defeat. He set himself grimly to the task of having the nine ready. Schuyler was coached and watched as though he were a delicate baby.

Students came swarming to each practice period. But now, instead of cheering and singing and making merry, a strange silence held them. A good play would bring a quick shout—and then the noise would stop. The whole school seemed to know that this was not a time for frolic; this was a fight.

The night before the Hasbrouck game Schuyler went to bed early. If a night's sleep would make him any fitter, then he'd get the sleep. Before slipping between the sheets he took the Blue and White flag down from the wall.

"Good luck, Fairview," he muttered.

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He went to sleep with the flag under his pillow. When he awoke, he felt strong, alert, refreshed. He went to the field for morning practice. The talk was all of Hasbrouck, of her string of victories, of the best way to stop her.

After dinner the nine left town. Thirty students went with them. The ride over was rather silent. The officials of the league had issued fielding and batting averages, and the players studied the ratings of the Hasbrouck players. Several of her boys had hit over .300. Schuyler shut his lips tight and resolved that they wouldn't hit .300 against him.

In the Hasbrouck dressing-room the nine got into uniform. Hasbrouck students stood around at the windows and shouted in that Fairview was going to be the eleventh victim. Pilgrim bit his lips and muttered that he'd like to hand those fellows something.

The Hasbrouck players were dressing only a few feet away. Carrots and Buddy studied them. Here a boy dropped a stocking; there a boy fumbled with a shoe and growled under his breath. Once or twice a quarrel flared and went out.

Carrots drew a slow breath. "They're strained to the breaking point," he told Buddy. "They see a chance for a championship. They know that a single defeat will be the end. They're scared stiff for fear they'll lose today. Any team that feels that way is licked if the other team gets a lead."

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"We'll get the lead," said Buddy. When the warm-up practice was over, he drew the players around him on the bench.

"Hasbrouck is ready to crack," he announced. "Isn't she, Carrots?"

The huckster boy nodded. "She's ready to crack wide open," he added.

"Get the jump on them," Buddy said, "and this game is ours."

Schuyler's face hardened. "Get me a couple of runs and I'll beat them if I have to throw my arm out."

They got him the runs in the first inning. Pilgrim and Hill singled, McCarter sacrificed, and Neale hit a corking liner to left field. Pilgrim and Hill scored, and came running to the bench wild with excitement. The Hasbrouck infielders gathered around their pitcher and wrangled.

"Didn't I tell you?" Carrots chuckled.

"Play ball!" Fairview's thirty rooters screeched gleefully. The Hasbrouck players went back to the stations, and Yost scratched a single past the short-stop. Neale raced to third.

The pitcher was sent from the mound. A new hurler appeared. Carlson struck out, but Linquist singled, and Neale scored with the third run. There was more wrangling out on the field. Buddy gave the ball a vicious blow, but it fell into the hands of an outfielder. The side was out.

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"Hasbrouck will come to bat too anxious to hit," said Carrots. "Use your noodle, Schuyler."

Schuyler nodded and kept the ball away from the plate. The Hasbrouck batters swung crazily. The game that had been so badly feared suddenly began to seem like the softest kind of a picnic.

When the seventh inning arrived the decision was no longer in doubt. Hasbrouck was beaten—decisively beaten. Carrots lolled back on the bench.

"When a team cracks after winning a string of victories," he said, "it cracks bad. Remember how the Giants went to pieces against Brooklyn last fall after winning more than twenty straight?"

"Wasn't that the time McGraw left the field in disgust?" Neale asked.

Carrots nodded. "That Hasbrouck captain will be leaving in a minute."

But Carrots was wrong. The Hasbrouck captain stuck with his players to the finish. Crestfallen and silent, he led them from the field.

Fairview could hardly believe that she had met the mighty Hasbrouck and had triumphed. The danger past. Gosh! wasn't that a comfort!

There was no silent studying of averages on the way back. From end to end the stage coach echoed the sound of excited, babbling voices. Sometimes the school song would be sung with a volume that almost rattled the windows.

When the stage arrived at Fairview, the student

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body was waiting. Grammar school boys were also there. A mighty roar went up when Buddy announced the result.

"Now," said Neale, "if Saddle River has done us a favor by beating Irontown——"

But Saddle River had lost again. And Lackawanna, Garrison and Bloomfield had triumphed over Brunswick, Pompton and Gates.

The league standing was soon ready:

	W.	L.	PC.		W.	L.	PC.
Irontown	13	3	.812	Bloomfield	7	9	.437
Fairview	12	4	.750	Saddle River...	6	10	.375
Hasbrouck	10	6	.625	Garrison	6	10	.375
Lackawanna ...	10	6	.625	Gates	5	11	.312
Pompton	8	8	.500	Brunswick	3	13	.187

"Gosh!" said Neale. "Even if Brunswick wins the two games left she can't get out of last place."

"She has a gym, and lockers, and a paid coach," McCarter teased.

Buddy frowned and shook his head warningly. But Schuyler did not take offense.

"Wasn't I the gillie?" he laughed.

The cellar championship was settled. The real championship, however, was still in doubt. Next Wednesday the nine played Pompton, and on Saturday it closed the season with Irontown.

Buddy did not particularly fear Pompton. She

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had earned but one victory from a team in the first division. Seven of her victories had been at the expense of second division teams—two from Bloomfield, two from Saddle River, two from Brunswick and one from Gates.

Monday the round of practice began again. The biggest event of the day was when Arthur Stone took his place alongside Schuyler and began to throw to Buddy. It was the first time he had used his arm in a week.

Carrots said he could work fifteen minutes—and Carrots held a watch. Arthur reported that the pain was gone. Buddy's face lighted up as though he had heard some very good news.

Next day Arthur pitched for half an hour. At the finish he came running over to where Carrots stood.

"Not a pain," he cried. "It feels great."

"If Schuyler beats Pompton tomorrow," the coach answered, "I guess we'll give Irontown something to think about."

Schuyler smiled. If Fairview was beaten it would not be because he had not tried. He had been asked to win three games. He had won two. Just one more, and then it was up to Arthur.

Next day the school throbbed with excitement. At morning assembly there was a restlessness that would not have been tolerated at any other time. However, the work for the year was about over,

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and Dr. Minor made allowances. In fact, he was going to see that Pompton game himself.

Boys whose classroom work was usually excellent today stumbled woefully. Other boys failed to hear when their names were called, and stared dreamily at the ceiling. And in the first hour of the afternoon session, a boy was asked for his answer on a problem on which his class had been working, and he gave the answer as .764. At once two other boys jumped from their seats and said that he had made a mistake and had given what Fairview's percentage would be if she won that day.

When classes were over the students assembled outside the school. There were cries of, "Give the nine a chance to get dressed." Buddy and the players hurried off to the field house.

They were not on the field long before the students appeared marching with a lock-step. A chant of "Hip, hip, hip, hip," timed their stride. Three deep, they spread out along the first-base line.

Minute after minute passed. Pompton should have arrived before this. The players and the students grew anxious. Finally Dr. Minor came walking toward the field from the direction of the school. He called Buddy. The other boys wanted to rush toward him, but did not dare.

"Pompton," the principal said, "telephoned that

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she was delayed and would arrive as soon as possible."

Buddy shouted the message up and down the field. The players quit their practice and came in to their bench and sat down. Carrots frowned. He didn't like this at all. He was afraid that the squad would get nervous waiting.

If he had some news that would keep them talking—— His eyes narrowed a moment and then popped open.

"Anybody remember what that Lackawanna captain said the time he was here?" he asked suddenly.

Heads were shaken slowly. Nobody remembered.

"He said that Irontown had rubbed it in scoring those twenty-one runs. Remember?"

"I remember that," said Hill.

"And that the beating had taken the heart out of his team," Carrots went on.

"Oh, yes." McCarter nodded. "I remember now."

"And that his team was sore, and that the next time they met Irontown——"

"They play Irontown today," cried Carlson.

Everybody remembered now. Lackawanna had vowed that she would win.

Here was a topic rich with meat. The players discussed it eagerly and forgot all about nervousness. Only Schuyler was silent. With such a

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golden prospect, his part lay clearly before him. *He had to win!*

"Here comes Pompton," cried the students at last.

The players scurried away from the bench to limber up again before the cry of "Play ball!" Schuyler, Arthur and Ahrens all began throwing to Buddy.

Pompton did not delay. She hurried her dressing, hurried her practice, and announced that she was ready.

The game started an hour late; and at once it gave promise of being a real game. The second Pompton batter tripled and scored on a sacrifice fly.

"We'll get that one back," said Buddy.

Pompton got two more in the second. A single, a base on balls, an error by Neale and an infield out did the damage. The third inning began with the score 3 to 0 against Fairview, and with Neale calling himself a fat-head under his breath.

But now Schuyler seemed to have found himself. Pompton went out weakly in the third, and weaker still in the fourth. In the fifth, thanks to a whale of a home run hit by Linqvist, Fairview tallied her first run. The starting of the sixth found the score 3 to 1 against the Blue and White.

Schuyler pitched the sixth hoping that that home

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run was the start of a rally. Fairview, however, failed to repeat when she came to bat again.

The seventh inning started. Pompton was again blanked. Fairview's rooters broke into imploring cheers. The lucky seventh. Come on, Fairview. Oh, come on!

Fairview started none too brightly. Schuyler struck out on three pitched balls, and Pilgrim was thrown out on an infield grounder. Hill bunted and beat the throw, McCarter crashed a single to center, and Neale was purposely given his base on balls.

On the bench Schuyler shook his head as though in pain. "If I had got on," he whispered, "we'd have a run in now and only one out."

Yost seemed to resent the fact that the pitcher had passed Neale to get at him. He choked his bat, stepped in on a curve, and shot a hit to right field. Hill and McCarter scored the tying runs.

The Fairview rooters went crazy with joy. Schuyler threw his cap on the ground and pounded his knees with his fists.

"Come on, Carlson," he pleaded.

Carlson also got a base on balls. The bases were crowded again and Linqvist was up—Linqvist who had hit the home run.

"Here goes your old ball game," shrieked the students.

Linqvist tried to murder the first pitch.

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"The chump," said Carrots. "Can't he be satisfied with a short hit?"

Evidently Linquist was trying to crack another knockout blow. He swung heavily at the next pitch and popped a little fly that the pitcher caught.

"Home runs are bad," Carrots sighed. "They make a fellow greedy."

Schuyler went out to the mound feeling that but for him more runs would have been scored. If he hadn't struck out——

"Come on, Schuyler!" cried Yost. "Hold them now. They're easy."

Oh, he'd hold them! He put everything he had on the ball, and three Pompton batters walked to the plate and trudged away again, hitless. The students broke into a roar:

He's all right!
Who's all right?
Schuyler Arch.

Buddy was first up for Fairview, and flied out. Schuyler struck out again. Pilgrim was safe on an error, and Hill's hit sent him to third. It looked as though Fairview was going to go into the lead. But McCarter's liner went right at the shortstop, and that boy knocked it down and tossed to the first-baseman.

Schuyler strode to the mound again. His face showed that he was distressed. If he hadn't struck

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out again—— He shook his head. He'd hold Pompton, and he'd keep holding her, and maybe in the end Fairview would score the winning run.

Buddy left the bench slowly. The sun had gone down behind the trees. The Irontown game, probably started on time, was now over. If Lackawanna had won—— He beckoned to the students. Poole ran over.

"Telephone to Irontown," Buddy whispered. "Find out how their game went."

Poole dashed away.

Pompton tried hard in her half of the ninth, but against Schuyler's pitching she was helpless. True, one boy got on, but that was owing to a fumble by Hill. Despairing of being batted around, he tried to steal second, and Buddy threw him out.

"Now!" cried Carrots as the nine came to the bench. "Get a run this time and it's all over."

Neale was first to bat. Cries and cheers and a bedlam of yells greeted him. The first two balls he let go by, and one was a ball and one was a strike. He swung at the third. The first-baseman made a jump and a clutch and straightened his back regretfully. Neale ran to first, edged toward second, saw he could not make it and came back.

"O Yost," pleaded the students.

Yost hit to the third-baseman, and Neale was forced out at second.

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Carlson was implored to do his prettiest. He struck out.

Again Linquist came to bat. Carrots, however, had talked to him on the bench. Instead of swinging as though he wanted to drive the ball as far as Europe, he took a short, snappy chop. And his chopping blow was good enough to drop the ball in the outfield for two bases. Yost was held on third.

"Oh, you Buddy!" screeched the students. "Clean it up! Clean it up!"

Buddy dumped the ball in front of the plate and streaked toward first. Yost did not dare to try for home. However, he did almost as well. He worried the catcher into holding the ball a moment, and when that boy finally threw to first, Buddy was safe.

Three on the bases—and Schuyler at bat.

The pitcher's face was white as he arose from the bench. Twice he had struck out weakly. If he should do so again, he would be robbing Fairview of her chances.

"Here comes Poole on a run," said Neale. "Didn't Buddy send him on an errand?"

The whole bench turned and looked. Poole reached the rooters, broke through, cried something to them, and kept on. But before he reached the bench the students were shouting the glad tidings:

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"Lackawanna beat Irontown. Kill it, Schuyler! Win your own game! Drive it out, old man!"

The white left Schuyler's face. Something like desperation was in his eyes. If he hit, Fairview and Irontown would be tied again. And Arthur Stone, after a two weeks' rest, would be in shape to fight tooth and nail for the final game and the championship.

Schuyler stepped to the plate. The Pompton catcher crouched into position.

"You're a cheesy batter," he said pleasantly. "You won't hit the ball."

Schuyler said nothing. He watched the pitcher, watched, and watched, and watched. When the ball was pitched, he swung and missed.

"Only takes one to hit it," McCarter cried encouragingly from the first-base coaching box.

Schuyler's hands were like ice. Again the pitcher threw the ball; again he swung and missed.

An agony of hopelessness seized him. His courage fled. He stood there waiting for the next pitch convinced that he would not hit it.

Out from the students came a song:

Come, lift your voices, let them ring,
To Fairview's praise and glory—

It stiffened Schuyler like an electric shock. He was a Fairview fellow, and Fairview's motto was

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fair play and stick to your guns. He gripped the bat tighter. He might fail. He might strike out again. But it would not be because he had wilted and had quit.

Slowly the bat came back. His arms grew tense. He waited.

The pitcher's arm came forward.

Never had Schuyler been able to judge a ball as he judged this. His eyes seemed gifted, momentarily, with a marvelous vision. He saw it shift its course ever so slightly, saw it break, saw it dip——

His bat swung out.

He felt the shock of wood meeting leather. He did not look to see where the ball had gone. He heard the roar of voices in his ears. He raced for first, crossed it, stumbled as he tried to slow up, and found himself hugged by a dozen arms while other arms tried to reach him.

"Right over the shortstop's head," screamed a voice in his ears. "We're tied with Irontown again. O, you Schuyler boy!"

"Please let me go," he begged. They picked him up bodily and ran with him toward the field house. He was tired, and muscle sore, and jolted and prodded with elbows and hands and shoulders—and very, very happy.

CHAPTER XII

FAIRVIEW'S GLORY

NEXT day Fairview came down to earth. The top rung of the ladder was still to be reached. Irontown had to be beaten.

Schuyler ceased to hold the center of the stage. Everybody was interested in Arthur. When he pitched that afternoon boys began to crowd in back of Buddy to watch his delivery. Carrots chased them. He wanted nothing that might make Arthur nervous.

Arthur, though, appeared to have left his nerves at home. He pitched until told to stop. Then, languidly, he ran his arms into a sweater and strolled off with Schuyler.

"Arm feel all right?" Schuyler asked.

Arthur nodded. "Never felt better, thanks to you." He was silent a moment. "If Fairview wins that pennant, the school can thank you, Schuyler. You fought alone, and gave me a chance to come back."

Schuyler's cheeks flushed. "Oh, forget it," he protested.

"I won't," Arthur said, "and the school won't

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forget it, either. You're all right, Schuyler."

"No," Schuyler answered slowly; "it's the school that's all right."

Next day was Friday, the day before the game. The students planned a monster demonstration—cheers, songs, a dance around the diamond, and a parade through the village with the players riding on willing shoulders. But Buddy, getting news of what was intended, decided that there would be no celebration at all. He wanted the nine calm and quiet, not all keyed up and tense.

"Everybody to the field on the run," he ordered, "as soon as classes are over."

While the students gathered leisurely that afternoon in front of the school the players hustled into uniform and got out on the field. Buddy warmed up Arthur. As soon as his arm was limber he was sent to the mound and batters were called to the plate.

Only one question interested the captain today. Could Arthur fool the batters? Arthur could. Fifteen minutes later the batting was at an end, and Buddy announced that that was all for the day. The players were hustled back to the field house.

When the students arrived all primed for clamor and excitement, the nine was gone. To each player Buddy had given the same advice:

"Keep away from the field house until noon tomorrow."

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The captain was on his way home when he met Carrots hurrying down a side street. The huckster boy stopped short.

"Hello! What's wrong?"

"I cut the practice short," Buddy explained. "The school wanted to do things with a bang. I was afraid——"

"Did you pitch Arthur a little while—try him out?"

Buddy nodded. His face told what the result had been. Carrots grinned.

"You wise old owl, you," he said. "You won't need a coach next season."

It had been easy for Buddy to give the order to stay away from the field until noon. It was hard for him to keep it. A dozen times, after breakfast next morning, he wanted to go there and walk around, to feel the dirt under his feet, to view the field from behind the plate. However, he restrained his desires—but he asked his mother to please, *please* have dinner early.

He ate sparingly, for he knew the dangers of an overloaded stomach. Then came a session in his room when he worked a few drops of oil into the cup of his mitt. At last he strode off to meet his fate.

Early as it was, high school boys and grammar school boys were gathering. In the field house Buddy found Schuyler and Neale and Wally

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Hamilton. The pitcher and the second-baseman were studying the record of the last Irontown game.

"They didn't hit you at all, Schuyler," Neale said.

"They won't hit Art," Schuyler answered.

After that players kept dropping in. Outside there was the sound of a great crowd gathering. And by and by, just as Fairview was getting ready to go out, a great clamor of horns arose. Nearer and nearer it came. The players ran to the doorway.

Down the road swept four carry-alls. Irontown had arrived!

"Gee!" said Neale. "When we went to Irontown last year we only had one stage."

"Stages don't win ball games," said Schuyler. He walked out with an arm across Arthur Stone's shoulders.

Captain Drake, of Irontown, shook hands with Buddy. His players had ridden over in uniform and they did not have to dress. Irontown took possession of the field in back of the third-base line. Fairview held its old place along the first-base path.

Soon a dozen baseballs were flying about. Gradually order ruled. Irontown had the field to herself. From in back of third base came a gay, lilting, rollicking:

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Men of iron,
Men of Irontown;
Yours will be the victory,
Yours will be the crown,
Yours will be the glory,
Theirs the saddened frown—
Men of iron,
Men of Irontown.

Fifteen minutes later Fairview took the field.
And then another song was heard:

Come, lift your voices, let them ring,
To Fairview's praise and glory—

Schuyler wondered how he had ever been able to think that Men of Iron was the better song.

Presently the preliminary practice was over. It was time for the game to start. A hush settled over the field as though boys were holding their breaths and waiting for something to happen.

Arthur Stone walked out to position. A Fairview cheer rose and fell. Again that hush. The Irontown batter stepped to the plate. The voices of the coaches rose shrilly. Buddy crouched and motioned with his mitt. Arthur shook his head. Buddy motioned again. Arthur nodded and pitched.

"Ball one!"

A sharp yell from Irontown. Once more Arthur

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delivered the ball. The batter lifted a fly to Carlson.

It was Fairview's turn to cheer; and when the next two batters were thrown out by McCarter, the cheer became a roar.

"There's going to be some excitement in this game," said Carrots.

Nor was he mistaken. Pilgrim hit the first ball pitched for a single. Hill hit the second ball, and Irontown executed a beautiful double play. McCarter did not hit the ball at all.

"It's going to be a close game," said Carrots.

Again he was right. The end of the fifth inning found the score 0-0.

Arthur had pitched superbly. The Irontown pitcher had done as well. The cheering sections were hoarse and tired. But the game went on, snappy, thrilling, teeming with possibilities. And back of it all was the fact that the nine that scored first would probably win.

Irontown got a boy as far as third in the sixth. Buddy's heart almost stood still. There was only one out at the time. Arthur, though, was equal to the emergency. He caused the next batter to pop into the air, and the third boy's grounder was easy for Yost.

Buddy came to the bench still shaken by the force of that Irontown threat. If that run had scored—— He sat down beside Carrots.

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"Try hitting that curve before it breaks," said Carrots.

Neale, Yost and Carlson all tried, but could not hit safely. They edged forward as far as the batter's box would permit. The Irontown pitcher grinned at their helplessness.

Irontown did not get a runner on in the seventh.

"Wait him out this time," Carrots counseled.

So Linquist, Buddy and Arthur Stone all waited the Irontown pitcher out, and got no results. Linquist, forced to hit with the count three balls and two strikes, struck out. Buddy's fly was easy for the outfield, and Arthur's bouncer was smothered by the infield.

The eighth inning started, and still the scorekeepers had nothing in their books but ciphers.

Something had to be done. A run had to be scored someway. Buddy's mind raced. How, how, how?

Mechanically, his catching was all that could be desired. His mind, however, was looking ahead. Pilgrim would be first up for Fairview. If he could get on base, if he could——

Crack! The batter had hit the ball. Buddy, straightening by magic, saw the ball bound toward Hill, saw the third-baseman run to the left, trap it and throw to Yost. The umpire's arm waved "out." Buddy's mind went back to its problem.

This Irontown pitcher kept sticking the ball be-

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tween the knee and the waist. If Fairview should begin to hit it, if only bunts——

Crack! Another hit. This time Buddy saw the ball drop into Neale's hands. The moment the catch had been made he raised two fingers, shouted, "Two out, fellows," and was off with his thoughts.

Why, the kind of low ball the Irontown pitcher threw was perfect for bunting. None of the players was good at that type of hitting. However, might they not just as well try bunts and swing at the ball and get nowhere? And if Pilgrim, the fastest base-runner on the team, got on the bases——

Crack! Another hit. Buddy gasped. Pilgrim was running with his back to the diamond. The Irontown rooters were frenzied.

Around the bases an Irontown runner sped. Nobody watched him. All eyes were on Pilgrim. How he did run! Now it seemed that the ball would go far over his head; now it seemed that it wouldn't go so far over; and now it seemed as though Pilgrim had a chance. The Irontown cheers died down.

Suddenly Pilgrim swung halfway around. Five, six, seven steps he ran, and sprang into the air. The ball struck his glove and fell, and he caught it with the other hand.

Bedlam on Fairview's side of the field. Cheers for "Pilgrim, Pilgrim, Pilgrim." Arthur, a little

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white, walked toward the bench and sat down, trembling. It had been a narrow shave.

Buddy was breathing fast. Irontown, no doubt, had been shaken by that play. He had been shaken, too, but for all that his mind was back with its problem. He caught Ahrens by the shoulder.

"Run out and meet Pilgrim," he ordered. "Tell him to walk in slowly—slowly, mind. I want him to have his wind when he goes to bat."

Ahrens departed on a run. Carrots looked up inquiringly.

"What's the idea, Bud?"

"We're going after Irontown," Buddy answered. He took off his chest protector and sat down beside the coach.

Pilgrim came to the bench, blushing and doffing his cap to the cheers.

"Kill time," said Buddy. "You're not all right yet. Fix your shoe laces."

Pilgrim gave him a surprised glance, but obeyed. He fussed with one lace and then fussed with the other. When he stood up at last his breathing was normal.

"Now," said Buddy, "listen. Go up there. Take a swing at the first ball. I don't care where it is, swing at it. Miss it. Then wait for the next good one and bunt."

"All right." Pilgrim turned away.

"Wait!" The outfielder turned. "When you hit

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the ball, go for first, and when you reach the bag keep on for second."

"Suppose the ball beats me to first?" Pilgrim asked.

"Where are you bound for when you leave the plate?" Buddy asked.

"Why," Pilgrim stammered, "for—for——"

"Yes?" Buddy asked.

"Oh!" Pilgrim understood. "For second," he answered. He selected his bat and walked out.

Carrots leaned closer to Buddy. "What's the game?" he asked.

"That pitcher is using a perfect bunting ball," Buddy answered. "We might as well try that. We're not hitting him."

Carrots scratched his head. "Oh, but I'm the boob! I never thought of it because I knew the team was punk on bunting. Taking chances, eh? And taking a chance on Pilgrim upsetting their infield, eh? Gee! Buddy, if he gets away with it you're in clover."

The whole bench had heard Pilgrim's instructions. Eagerly they crouched forward, more, more, more——

"Cheese it!" Carrots hissed. "Want Irontown to smell that something's up?"

The first ball was wide. Pilgrim took a heavy swing. From the Irontown rooters came laughs and advice for Pilgrim to get an oar.

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The next ball was wide, too. The next was over.

For once in his life Pilgrim made a perfect bunt. Gently it dropped, ten feet to the left of the plate, and began to roll easily toward the third-baseman.

Like a frightened boy, Pilgrim raced down the base path. The Irontown third-baseman snapped up the ball with one hand and threw toward first.

Pilgrim's foot hit the bag a second before the ball arrived. The first-baseman, receiving the throw, glanced about for the runner. No runner was in sight. Startled, he glanced toward second. He saw Pilgrim's scurrying legs, heard the warning yells of Irontown and the hopeful screams of Fairview, and promptly lost his head. His throw to second was wild.

Schuyler was coaching at third, and Pilgrim caught the signal—*come on!* Halfway there he caught another signal—*slide!* Forward he threw himself, and there was a confusion of dust and player and ball.

"Safe!" ruled the umpire.

"Oh, come off," cried Drake, the Irontown captain. He caught himself, and bit his lips and turned away. The man who had made the decision was Irontown's own umpire.

The Fairview boys had forgotten their hoarseness. A song that had not been sung for months suddenly was heard:

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"We'll get the county pennant and we'll get it good and tight,

We'll get it without fighting, it won't even be a fight"——

Not even a fight? A hoot of derision came from the Irontown students. Even Fairview began to see the joke. For a moment the song faltered; then it went on. Finally the last note died away. Silence settled over the field.

Buddy felt as though he had ten hearts and that they were all beating at once. Yet, outwardly he was calm. He knew that here was Fairview's big chance. A runner on third and none out. The excitement of the moment played havoc with his judgment. When Hill looked at him he gave his order in one word:

"Bunt!"

Hill walked toward the plate.

"Hold on!" cried Carrots to the captain. "You're woozy now, Bud. You can't bunt. The whole infield is playing in to cut off that run at the plate."

Buddy gave a start. Here! He couldn't let excitement grip him if it was going to lead him to give foolish orders. He calmed himself with an effort and signaled to Schuyler. And when Hill reached the plate, he found Schuyler flashing a new order to him from the third-base coaching box—hit it out!

Hill tried hard, but succeeded only in lifting a

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foul. The Irontown catcher caught the ball.
From the Irontown section came a hopeful:

“Men of Iron,
Men of Irontown;
Yours will be the victory,
Yours will be the crown”——

McCarter hit the first ball pitched. It went right at the shortstop. Pilgrim made a break for home.

“Come back!” cried Schuyler. There didn’t seem to be a chance to score on a hit like that; and, besides, McCarter would make only the second out and there would be another chance.

Pilgrim came back to the bag. The Irontown shortstop fumbled. It was too late then for a fresh start for the plate. Pilgrim, grinning, watched McCarter reach first base safely.

Schuyler swallowed a lump in his throat. He forgot that what he had done had been proper baseball. His only thought was that if he hadn’t called Pilgrim back a run would be in.

McCarter, jubilant, took a big lead off first. He planned to go down to second on the first ball pitched. He edged off a little more, a little more—and then came a quick throw from the pitcher and he was out.

Again Irontown’s song, this time jubilant:

“Men of Iron,
Men of Irontown”——

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Schuyler groaned. If he hadn't held Pilgrim back—— Oh, why wasn't he a good hitter, so that he could go in there and bat for somebody and redeem his mistake?

Neale came to the plate. Fairview, with her golden chance almost gone, sang with courage unbroken:

"Come, lift your voices, let them ring,
To Fairview's praise and glory"——

With two out, the Irontown infield played back. The very hunch of Neale's shoulders told that he was there to hit solidly.

Schuyler, watching with burning eyes, caught the flash of the catcher's signal. Two fingers in the hollow of the big mitt. He watched the ball that came. A swift one, straight over, and waist high.

Neale fouled it.

"Strike one!"

"Y-aaaa-h!" came from Irontown.

The next pitch missed the plate.

"Ball one!"

Again Schuyler caught that flash of a signal—— two fingers in the hollow of the mitt.

"Watch it now," he yelled suddenly.

It was the call for the batter to look his way. Neale's head turned. Schuyler signaled him to bunt the next ball. Pilgrim, aware of what was coming, gathered himself for a dash for home.

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On the Fairview bench there was commotion. Buddy jumped up and then sat down. Schuyler saw it all. His body turned cold. He was not expected to give orders like that without authority from the captain. He had taken the game into his own hands. Suppose Neale failed?

But an inner voice whispered that it was the play. The ball would be waist high, perfect for bunting. Of course, Neale was not much on that type of hitting. The infield, however, was playing back. A bunt was not expected. The play might come off. And it was a perfect ball for a bunt, waist high.

Schuyler's face grew tense. Would the pitcher never throw the ball? At last it was on its way.

He saw Neale choke his bat. He saw the bat pushed out. He heard a grunt from Drake, the Irontown captain, and out of the corner of his eyes he saw Drake swoop in. He saw the bat meet the ball.

"Home!" he shrilled.

He might have saved his breath, for Pilgrim was already on his way.

A moment later Fairview's cheer arose to a shriek. Pilgrim was across the plate, Neale was only a few steps from first, and out on the diamond Drake was juggling with a twisting ball that had eluded his grasp.

Oh, the wild joy of that minute! Fairview rooters tumbled about on the grass. Schuyler's head

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swam. Buddy, on the bench, kept breaking out in little, hysterical laughs.

"Why did he do that, Carrots? Why did he signal for a bunt?"

"You can search me," said Carrots, "but he knew what he was doing."

The Irontown infield gathered about the pitcher. When they went back to their places at last, their faces were hard and determined. The pitcher whipped three balls across the plate; and Yost, with bulging eyes, watched them go past and did not offer at any of them.

"Batter out!" ruled the umpire.

"Gee!" said Carrots. "They're fighting mad now. First half of the ninth. Hold them, fellows."

The players lingered at the bench. They were waiting for Schuyler. He came in to them on a run.

"I wasn't trying to get fresh, Buddy," he cried rapidly. "I read that catcher's signal. It was for a straight ball, waist high. And the infield was playing back, and——"

Buddy's hand gave his shoulder a resounding whack. That was all. Schuyler dropped down on the bench with a peaceful smile. Good old Fairview! Plucky Fairview! Simple, unaffected, honest Fairview!

Buddy and Arthur Stone walked out together.

"I'm going to cut loose with everything I have," Arthur said.

FAIRVIEW'S GLORY

He needed every inch of it. The first Irontown boy hit a liner that almost knocked Hill down, but the third-baseman clung to it and wrung his hands. The next boy hit the ball so high into the air that it seemed only a speck. The spectators held their breath. Down it came, where Neale was waiting. The second-baseman made a neat catch.

Fairview scented victory. A deafening shout arose as the third batter, striking too soon, dribbled the ball to Hill for the third out. The game was over.

County champions! Again and again the cry echoed across the field. Joining hands, the students formed a ring around the players and danced until they were tired.

Irontown had little to say. Drake was heart-broken because his error had lost the game. He climbed into one of the carry-alls with two players trying to comfort him. The horns began to toot. The vehicles rattled and groaned and turned. Off they rolled with the horns still tooting—but it was a different kind of blare than that which had signaled their arrival. Irontown in defeat was not as mighty as Irontown in triumph.

Into the field house the nine romped at last. Thrills chased themselves up and down Schuyler's back. County champions! Gosh!

A sudden idea came to him. Had any of the fellows ever seen the high school from the little hill to the west? Come on; he'd show them.

THE COUNTY PENNANT

He led the way until he came to that thoroughfare that looked as though the workmen had forgot to finish it.

"Down there, fellows," he said. Below, snuggled in a little hollow, was the high school. Its walls, faded and gray, rose peacefully from the stretches of green lawn.

The players grew strangely silent.

"Ever see it that way before?" Schuyler asked eagerly.

They never had—not just as they saw it now. Softly the song came from their throats:

"Come, lift your voices, let them ring
To Fairview's praise and glory;
No stain shall darken any page
Of Fairview's splendid story.
Then here's to her, long may she light
The path of honor and of right.
Fairview, the bravest of the brave,
Long may her noble banners wave."

Schuyler did not sing the second stanza. He dared not for fear they would discover how choked and husky his voice had become. Fairview! The best little school that ever was!

His Fairview!





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